# UNCLE JAMES' SHOES

DORIS AND SAMUEL C. WEBSTER

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By DORIS and SAMUEL WEBSTER

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To
JAMES H. BALDWIN
who was *not* the original

# CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | Billy Defies the Great Man of Stormville | 3 |
| II. | Introduces W. Clintock & Co., Inc. | 23 |
| III. | Uncle James's Health Continues to be Excellent | 42 |
| IV. | Billy Rescues a Basket—and a Lady | 62 |
| V. | A World of Pearl | 78 |
| VI. | "Five Years from Now" | 94 |
| VII. | Uncle James Rearranges Matters | 115 |
| VIII. | Uncle James Wages the Great Price War | 135 |
| IX. | Randolph Explains | 159 |
| X. | Billy Begins to Show Signs of Sense | 186 |
| XI. | The Alliances are Rearranged | 205 |
| XII. | The World is Turned Upside Down | 219 |
| XIII. | Randolph Recommends a Way Out | 245 |
| XIV. | In Which Billy Goes Hungry | 263 |

# UNCLE JAMES' SHOES

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## CHAPTER I

### BILLY DEFIES THE GREAT MAN OF STORMVILLE

UNCLE JAMES was coming to dinner. That was why Euphemia was making a lemon meringue pie. Uncle James had a warm feeling toward lemon meringue pie which his sister figured might suffuse the little group of her dear ones as they gathered round the golden oak dining-room table. And the reason Euphemia was baking spaghetti in the glass dish was that James had given her the dish on her fifteenth wedding anniversary. And behind the asparagus was still another reason, the asparagus-tongs.

Obviously, Euphemia had not always lived modestly. Asparagus-tongs do not grace the tables of the poor. Mrs. Clintock's memory

could go back—and it often did—to the days when her father had been the leading citizen of Stormville, recognizing the great mass of the town simply as workers in his cannery. Mrs. Clintock, when Miss Euphemia Peters, had worn broadcloth, walked on Axminster, dined off mahogany. Then she had married William Clintock, and sunk, still clutching the asparagus-tongs, to serge, grass rugs, and golden oak.

Edward Willinger Peters had quarreled with his son-in-law, William Clintock, had cut off his daughter in his will in a fit of exasperation, and had died in the same fit. Doubtless, had Peters been able to survive the fit of exasperation, it would have worn off, and he would have reinstated his only daughter and forgiven her husband, but, as it was, Euphemia was left with nothing but William Clintock's measly salary and a piece of philosophy. Sitting before the asparagus-tongs, she often reflected on the ways of Fate, emerging from her reveries holding by the tail one fixed idea: never quarrel with your rich relatives.

Euphemia Clintock had a rich relative

on whom to exercise the wisdom learned through her devastating experience. Her elder brother, James, had inherited the Peters cannery and all the Peters wealth. To James Randolph Peters Euphemia deferred in a perpetual state of anxious apology. She might have given him Jimmy's head, or Martha's, on a charger had he asked for it. She certainly would have given him Billy's. Indeed, James, though seldom seen in the Clintock household, constantly stalked through it like a family ghost.

Euphemia's central idea in life was that the Clintock family should inherit Uncle James's fortune. Born to prosperity, she considered it her normal state, but she had no idea that it was a thing to be worked for. Money had been hers, and it must be hers again. And Uncle James was the obvious source from which it would come.

Jimmy and Martha Clintock grew up in fear of the Lord and Uncle James, especially Uncle James. In his presence their personalities scurried away, leaving empty little shells that he could n't possibly find offensive.

When Billy, the youngest, came along, Uncle James had come to completely shadow the Clintock house. Billy took to the barn.

Billy was in the barn on the day when lemon pie, glass dish, and asparagus-tongs had been assembled to do honor to Uncle James.

"Where *is* that boy?" cried his harassed mother for the twentieth time, as her husband, carefully dressed in his best, came into the parlor, where Euphemia was plumping up the cushions of the easy-chair.

William Clintock, a mild little man going on sixty, did not let the question get beyond his ear-drums. He had heard it so often that it had entirely lost the significance of an inquiry. "Did you see this?" he said, his eyes on the newspaper which he held. "Down in Norwalk, Connecticut, a Baldwin apple-tree was struck by lightning, and next morning they found it was loaded with baked apples. They had baked apples for a week." Slowly he added, "It does n't sound possible."

Euphemia, carefully rearranging a large framed photograph of James Peters, which

occupied the center of the mantel, made no comment on the phenomenon. Her interest was immediately attracted, however, when William Clintock was about to take the easy-chair. "No, William, that 's for James," she said, and William hastily took another chair, his eyes still on the paper.

"Now, don't you get talking politics to-night until you find out James's opinions," warned Euphemia. "If he says Roosevelt ought to be hanged, don't you say he had n't. If there 's anything James hates it 's a radical."

"I 'll be careful," promised William.

"Why *does n't* Billy get dressed?" cried Euphemia—another of her favorite questions that always remained unanswered. "I wish Billy had half of Jimmy's sense. My heart 's in my mouth every time James comes to the house. Billy contradicts him! *Deliberately* contradicts him when James happens to be wrong. That 's the worst time to contradict him."

"Oh, Billy 's all right," interposed William

gently. "He reminds me a lot of my grandfather, old Silas Clintock. He has a mind of his own."

Euphemia dropped tiredly into a chair. "It 's all very well to have a mind of your own when you can afford it," she contested, "If *you* had n't had a mind of your own and quarreled with Papa he would n't have left James the cannery and all the money and me nothing but the asparagus-tongs. If it had n't been for you, William, I 'd be living in the style I was accustomed to when I was Euphemia Peters. I don't want to lose any more through any one's mind of their own! Where *is* Billy?" She jumped up again and threw open the window. From the barn came the sound of energetic hammering. A minute later Mrs. Clintock flung open the barn door in exasperation. She had had a hard afternoon. Half the heads of the asparagus had boiled off, and the under crust of the pie had crumbled when she tried to roll it, because, in an unconscious desire to be lavish where James was concerned she had cut in too much butter.

"For Heaven's sake, Billy," she exploded, "why are n't you in the house getting dressed? What on earth have you got there? That old banged-up pail that I threw away?"

Billy clutched the pail. "It 's a perfectly good pail except for one or two holes!" he protested. "When I get through with this pail you won't know it!"

"Well, if that is n't like you, Billy Clintock!" cried his badgered mother. "There you go wasting your time on a pail that is n't worth two cents and maybe losing— Go upstairs and wash and dress this minute. And get that solder out of your finger-nails. Do you hear me?"

Slowly Billy wiped his hands on his knickerbockers and moved toward the door. He was going, but not in a chastened spirit. "Now, don't you let Jimmy or Martha or anybody touch that pail," he said. He spoke with a drawl, but earnestly. There was no suggestion of languor in his speech. It seemed rather as though he were unaccustomed to putting his thoughts into words, and were taking plenty of time to make them clear

and definite. "When I get through with that pail it won't even drip."

"This is n't any time to think of pails," interrupted his mother. "I declare, I wish you had more sense. Martha and Jimmie have been working themselves to death all day getting ready for Uncle James, and here you act as if you did n't care what he thought of us."

"Well," said Billy slowly, "I don't care what he does think of us. I don't think much of Uncle James."

There he stood, in his brown corduroy knickerbockers, kicking at the sill of the barn door, as well and cheerful as a boy could be. A bolt had not descended from Heaven and finished him then and there. His expression did change, though, as Uncle James, in all his overwhelming portliness, stepped around the corner of the barn and confronted him. Billy might say he did n't think much of Uncle James, but he had not quite thrown off the idea that Uncle James was a kind of Jehovah, unpleasant, perhaps, but vastly powerful. However, his brown eyes did not

flinch, his pink cheeks did not pale, as he looked into his uncle's cold gray eyes.

"So you don't think much of Uncle James?" said that misprized person.

"Well," said Billy slowly, "I guess you don't think much of me, either."

"And I should think he would n't!" cried Euphemia. "When your uncle is kind enough to come to dinner and is greeted with words like that—"

"He came before he was expected," demurred Billy, disclaiming responsibility. "I would n't have said it if I 'd known he was there."

"But behind my back," exploded his outraged uncle, "you snap your fingers at me! A boy like that"—he turned trembling upon his sister—"is n't fit to—to handle—"

"I know, James dear," agreed his frightened sister, "but there are Jimmy and Martha—" In her exasperation she was throwing Billy to the winds. It was the family way.

"Yes," admitted Uncle James bitterly, "there 's Jimmy—"

"Your namesake!" reminded Euphemia.

"And there 's Martha—"

"The dear girl has just made you a lemon-pie," lied her devoted mother.

*"And,"* said the great man ominously—the very birds appeared to stop singing to listen—*"And,"* he thundered, "there are Randolph and Henrietta and Wilhelmina!"

Euphemia cried out as if she had been hurt. It was no news to her. Every moment of the day she was conscious that there were Randolph and Henrietta and Wilhelmina. It was one of those lamentable facts of life that could n't be got around. Alas! There *were* Randolph and Henrietta and Wilhelmina.

"But James," she pleaded, attempting to discount the facts she could n't deny, "they are your *cousin's* children.

"They are," admitted James; but his tone implied, "What of it?"

Euphemia's hatred of her cousin Bessie swelled within her. Bessie had always come between her and James. And now Bessie's hand was outstretched towards James's fortune, her fingers were clutching at it. Euphemia swallowed her rage, but her blue eyes

were hard and her mouth set as she said lightly: "Poor things. I 'm glad you 're fond of them. They have n't much to look forward to in life. The girls are such little dunces, and Randolph is so ugly."

Uncle James drew himself up. "I am told," he said, "that Randolph looks like me."

"He does," said Billy earnestly. "Don't you remember, Mama, you said yourself—"

"Billy," ordered his mother sharply, "go into the house."

Only Uncle James was impervious to the nervous atmosphere of the dinner-table. Agitatedly, Euphemia changed the tea-cups from saucer to saucer so that James would be sure to get a good one, and in the end she gave him a cup that leaked and a saucer that did not match. She laughed a great deal, laughed at everything that was said. She tried to cover up her nervousness, the children's clumsiness, her husband's silence, by laughing. She gave Uncle James cream and no sugar, when he had asked for sugar and no cream. Having bought the cream expressly for James, she

could not seem to get over the idea that he ought to take it. Only when the asparagus-tongs were in her hands did Euphemia feel at ease. Then she became again Euphemia Peters, and James was only her older brother, an impressive person still, but nevertheless of her own blood.

William Clintock had long since fallen under the spell of Uncle James. His first great error in quarreling with his wife's father had left him defenseless. He felt that he had been a fool, and his wife did not hesitate to tell him so. He made amends by allowing her to steer him thenceforth. One idea she had firmly planted in his mind, and it had taken root. Under no circumstances must he quarrel with Uncle James. Bound hand and foot with the Uncle James idea, he sat at the end of the table, a plain citizen, plain in face and manner, and helped Uncle James to the breasts of the two chickens.

Uncle James amused himself by turning the knife in his sister's wounds. "I dined last night with Bessie," he began pleasantly.

"Yes?" encouraged Euphemia, with an in-

appropriate laugh. "And has Bessie recovered from that unbecoming cold?"

"Bessie," said James blandly, "was looking *extremely* well. And she was in excellent spirits. She has reason to be happy. Her son is perhaps not beautiful—I understand that you find Randolph exceptionally plain—but he has brains. Yes, Euphemia, he has brains."

"Oh, I never meant that Randolph was n't good looking," protested Euphemia. "In fact, I think he 's unusually handsome."

Her husband opened his eyes. "Why, Phemie," he said, "you always say he stops the clock." He thought he was safe in running down Bessie's children before James, but apparently he had put his foot in it again. Euphemia gave him a look that even William's simple mind could understand. It was his last remark during *that* meal.

"Randolph has an unusual mind," went on Uncle James. "A scientific brain. Yes, that that is what I call it—the scientific brain."

"That 's what I 've always called Jimmy's brain," put in Euphemia hopefully.

"I am sorry to hear it," said Uncle James. "Jimmy is now fifteen. I was about to suggest that he come into my office at the cannery and learn the business. I thought he had a plain business head. But if he has a scientific brain—I don't want him."

William Clintock, since he was not allowed to speak, contented himself with saying inwardly: "Jimmy has n't any brain at all. He 'd be wonderful in your business." Euphemia spoke in an awe-struck voice. "James," she said, "many and many a time I 've looked at Jimmy and said, 'That boy was *made* to can fish!' "

Jimmy, an anemic-looking boy, with lanky limbs and lanky hair, weak eyes and a weak chin, accepted the compliment humbly. He made no attempt to enter the conversation. His future was in the hands of Uncle James and the Lord.

"Now, Billy," went on Uncle James, dexterously leaving Jimmy hanging between heaven and earth, "Billy I shall not take into business unless he changes very much for the better during the next five years."

"I don't expect I 'm going to change at all," put in Billy hastily. He had a feeling that he had *not* been made to can fish.

"I 'm sorry," shrugged Uncle James. "You would benefit by any change. Benefit spiritually—and, possibly—financially."

Euphemia forgot her son's transgressions. She could not see the gates of paradise slammed in his face without making some effort to shove him through. "Oh, but, James, Billy has *some* good qualities," she urged. "He 's such a clever boy about mending things and fixing them over." And then came an inspiration, an inspiration that was to change Billy's life. That night she tossed and moaned and bit her tongue in anguish that the words had passed her lips, but as she sat there at dinner pleading Billy's cause they seemed the essence of tact. Indeed, they *were* tactful. If only Billy had n't—

"Why, James," she cried, "you should see the way he 's done over that old boat you gave him!"

Billy saw sooner than his mother what would happen. He looked furtively at Uncle

James and back at his plate again, concentrating on a snowy heap of mashed potatoes.

James cleared his throat. "So you 've mended that old—er—that nice boat, have you?" he asked. Billy grunted assent.

"And you should see how nicely he 's done it," put in Billy's proud mother. "You'd never know it was the same boat, James. He took the old boards out of the bottom and put in new ones, and filled up all the chinks with rosin or whatever it is, and painted it bright red. Why, James," archly, "you 'd never have thrown it away if you 'd known what could be done with it."

"Thrown it away!" James affected heavy surprise. "Who says I threw it away?" And Euphemia saw what she had done. Billy gave up shoveling away the potato-heap, put down his fork, and clenched his fists under the table. He was ready for battle.

"Why, that boat," went on Uncle James, slowly improvising, "is one of my proudest possessions. I 've had it around ever since I was Billy's age, and I tell you I 'm fond of that boat. That 's why I was willing to pay

good money to have it repaired. I 'll give you fifty cents for your work, boy, and," he ended munificently, *"and* the cost of the paint."

Billy's brown eyes blazed, and the color came to his cheeks. His round lips parted and he breathed hard. It was a moment before he was able to speak. Boldly, then, he launched his attack.

"That boat was kicking around in the mud," he flared, "and you wanted to get rid of it. You told me to cart it away and burn it up!"

"Billy, Billy," intoned Uncle James in shocked surprise, "do you think I 'd have given you a nice boat like that?"

"Of course you would n't have given me a nice boat," said Billy with unintentional irony, "but it *was n't* a nice boat—not till I got hold of it. It was n't worth a cent, and I could sell it now for twenty-five dollars."

Alas, it was the wrong argument. "That will do, Billy," said Uncle James, as one who settles a point once and for all; "the boat is mine."

"Did n't he give it to me, Jimmy?" cried Billy wildly. "You were there. Tell him he gave it to me!" It was a vain appeal. How can one left hanging in the air be expected to take a firm stand? "I don't remember," mumbled Jimmy, looking down at his plate.

"Spoken like a man!" applauded Uncle James. At that moment Billy cast off his family. For the first time he felt alone.

"Your Uncle James does n't want you to have it," reasoned Euphemia, so anxious to see her brother's point of view that she almost persuaded herself that he was right. "He 's afraid you might get drowned."

"I am not afraid he might get drowned," contradicted Uncle James. "I could contemplate the possibility with the utmost serenity."

"Martha dear," said Euphemia hurriedly, "take the dishes off and bring in your pie." Martha, an awkward fourteen-year-old, sloppy in figure but neat in dress and not bad looking on the whole, brought in the lemon meringue. It was consumed almost in silence.

Hot thoughts went rapidly through Billy's mind. He would hide the boat. No, they 'd find it right away. He 'd run away and never see them again. But he knew he would not. He 'd stove a hole in the boat and sink it! That was an inspiration! But his determination weakened instantly. He *could n't* spoil that nice new-looking red boat. He would n't have the heart. Well, he 'd think up some plan. He would n't give that boat to Uncle James without a struggle.

"Well, how about it, Jimmy?" boomed Uncle James. "Want to come into the business?" As though he had been pulled up by a wire, Jimmy ascended into the clouds. "I sure do, Uncle James," he gasped.

"I 'll give you five—no, four dollars a week to start on. I started on two myself," said Uncle James, and with a grand gesture he added, "And you shall have unlimited opportunity."

Jimmy could not help feeling a little disappointed as he looked around heaven, but at least the vista was magnificent. "Unlimited

opportunity" had a golden sound. "All right," he said, and left it to his mother to add, "Oh, thank you, James. You can't think what it means to us to have Jimmy with you. It will be a wonderful initiation into big business."

"And if Billy ever wants to come into the business," said Uncle James shortly, "he can row my boat home to my place to-morrow."

Billy did n't even answer. He had decided that Uncle James was no longer his uncle, was not a person of any importance, indeed was not present at all.

## CHAPTER II

### INTRODUCES W. CLINTOCK & CO., INC.

NEXT day was a Saturday, always an active day for Billy. And on this particular Saturday he had before him, besides his usual activities, the job of finding a way to keep his boat out of the clutches of Uncle James.

Billy went out to the barn before breakfast. The sign that he had painted the day before was dry. With excusable pride Billy read the announcement: "W. Clintock & Co., Incorporated. Buys any old broken bicycles, lawn-mowers, skates, packing-boxes, etc. Sells first-class skates, lawn-mowers, bicycles, furniture, etc." Billy liked the sound of "Incorporated." It gave the business standing.

After he had nailed up the sign over the barn door Billy went over his accounts. He kept them in an old school blank-book. Billy

began a new page with the date, after which he wrote in a firm round hand:

| | |
|---|---|
| Cash ..... | $ 6.25 |
| One bicycle, value ..... | 10.00 |
| One lawn-mower ..... | 5.00 |
| 2 pr. skates, ea. 50c .... | 1.00 |
| 1 sled ..... | |

Billy looked at the sled, which he had found on an ash-heap, and put down "10 cents." "But it 'll be worth more when I 'm through with it," he thought. He looked over the packing-boxes and valued them at fifty cents. The last item on his list was "1 boat." He put that down at $15, but added a question-mark. The boat was his prize possession. The total made $37.85. Billy closed his book with the air of a magnate and went in to breakfast.

After breakfast Billy made an early call on Charles H. Brown. Mr. Brown was a lawyer, fat, cheerful, and popular, especially with the boys of Stormville. He had been known to play baseball with them, and on one occasion treated the whole crowd to soda.

A few days before Brown had expressed an interest in Billy's boat, and Billy had him in mind as a possible customer. For obvious reasons the idea of selling the boat to a lawyer appealed to Billy.

Mr. Brown was at the breakfast-table eating griddle-cakes when Billy walked in. Mrs. Brown, who had apparently already finished breakfast, being an earlier riser than her husband, was up-stairs making beds. Billy took her chair at the breakfast-table and went at once to the point: "You told me the other day you 'd give me fifteen dollars for that boat. I 'll sell it to you to-day for—twenty."

Mr. Brown shook his head. "Fifteen 's all I 'll give," he said.

"Boats are going up," Billy reminded him, in the tone of "Don't say I did n't warn you."

"Well, my desire for a boat 's stationary," countered the lawyer.

A yellow puppy that had adopted the Browns a short time before put his big paws on Billy's knee. Billy fondled his soft ears. "I 'll tell you what I 'll do," said Billy. "You

give me twenty dollars, and I 'll drown this moth-eaten puppy of yours for you."

"Now Billy Clintock, don't think you can put anything like that over on me," warned the lawyer. "You 've wanted that dog for a month."

"Well," said Billy, "then suppose you give me fifteen dollars *and* the dog."

"Done," said Lawyer Brown.

"Of course you 're getting the best of the bargain," declared Billy, "but everybody says you 're the smartest lawyer in town—"

"Stop that, Billy Clintock!" ordered Mr. Brown. "They all tell me to look out for you. I expect that boat leaks like a sieve. I won't dare go out in it. I only want it to plant geraniums in."

"I don't sell leaky boats," said Billy indignantly. "Anything I sell has my guarantee on it, and I 'll take it back if it is n't satisfactory. It 's a first-class boat, and it 'll hold *ten* men that weigh three hundred pounds."

"I don't weigh three hundred pounds!" roared Lawyer Brown.

"How much *do* you weigh?" asked Billy, more from curiosity than impishness.

"Look here," returned Brown, "you go home and row that boat around to the creek. And take the pup. He 's just chewed up my wife's lace curtains. There 's one inside of him now that I ought to charge you for."

Billy picked up the wriggling puppy and started home in high feather. He had done well on two scores. Uncle James would not get that boat away from Lawyer Brown, even if he cared to try, which he probably would not. And the puppy was a wonder. Billy christened him Napoleon.

The puppy wriggled out of his arms and got under his feet, so that Billy had to walk over him at every step. In due course, however, they reached the Clintock house, a two-story white wooden affair, with a mail-order piazza.

Euphemia looked at the puppy from the kitchen door with an unfriendly eye. "What have you got there?" she demanded.

"A dog," explained Billy, superfluously;

and he hastened to add: "He 's a very fine dog. I would n't have been able to get him so cheap only he chews up Mrs. Brown's curtains."

The information did not increase Euphemia's love of the puppy. "You did n't pay good money for that mongrel?" she demanded. "Billy, you don't know a thing about the value of money."

"Mama, that dog 's worth all I paid for him and more," protested Billy. "Why, the curtain inside of him is worth ten dollars alone—"

"Well, don't you let him in the house," decreed Euphemia. "If you keep him at all he 'll have to stay in the barn."

"Of course," agreed Billy. He knew that all the dogs in the neighborhood were expected to stay in the barn, and that not one of them ever did. However, he took Napoleon to the barn and explained to him that this was home. Once more Billy went over his accounts, crossing out the boat item, changing cash on hand to $21.25, and adding to the list of his assets "1 dog, value . . . $5." Business

was booming. But Billy had an even bigger project on hand, to which he intended to devote the rest of the day.

About ten years before, Major Pratt had bought the first automobile ever seen in the streets of Stormville—a hard-tired one-lunger, with the general look of a buggy that had lost its horse. This horseless carriage, as it was appropriately called, had long since been superseded by other models; and, after it had given up trying to compete with them, it had remained inert in the Pratt barn.

Major Pratt had given this specimen to his grandson, Eddy, and for the last two weeks Eddy had lorded it over Stormville as the owner of an automobile. However, Stormville's lesser citizens had not hesitated to point out that the automobile would not go, a fact which was no news to Eddy. Indeed, Eddy had spent a good many hours under the automobile, and his passion for it was waning. Meanwhile, Billy had borrowed a book on repairing automobiles from the library, and was anxious to get at the patient; so, after leaving Mr. Brown's boat at the creek and

collecting his fifteen dollars, he walked over to Eddy Pratt's.

Eddy was in the barn making medals for a running-race that was to be held in his lane. Eddy's one ambition was to wear a medal; so he had decided that the best medal, a watch-fob ornament advertising a certain brand of tobacco, was to be awarded to the winner of a Special Race, to which contestants were to be invited—by Eddy. He looked Billy over and decided not to invite him to take part in the Special Race.

"Hello, Eddy," said Billy.

"Hello, Billy," said Eddy.

"What you going to do with that junk car you 've got there?" asked Billy.

"That 's no junk car!" protested Eddy. "Grandpa says that car 's gone ten thousand miles, and it 's good for ten thousand more."

"It 'll cost a lot to tow it ten thousand miles," observed Billy.

"Tow nothing!" cried Eddy. "I 'll have that car going in a week." But he spoke with less assurance than usual.

"I tell you," said Billy. "You know that

gun of mine? I 'll give you that for it."

"What! Give that third-hand gun for my automobile!" cried Eddy. "You 're crazy!"

"The gun 'll shoot," remarked Billy pointedly.

"Why, I would n't trade that automobile for a hundred dollars!" blustered Eddy.

"Oh, that car 's no good," said Billy. "They don't make 'em now with hard tires. The cars to-day—"

"Oh, *they 're* no good, the cars to-day," sniffed Eddy. "They don't make 'em of good material any more."

"Material! Why that thing 's nothing but wood and tin!" scoffed Billy. "And I 'll give you my gun and a mouth-organ and two dollars for it." He pulled out two dollars and laid them before Eddy.

Eddy looked at them a long while. "How much money 've you got?" he asked.

"That 's all I 've got for *that* car," replied Billy.

"You give me those other things and ten dollars," said Eddy, "and you can take the car. I won't take a cent less."

"Tell you what I 'll do," said Billy. "I 'll give you five dollars and the mouth-organ, and I won't give you a cent more."

"Take the car," said Eddy.

Billy laid down three more dollars, drew the mouth-organ from another pocket, added it to the money, and strutted over to the car. He pulled the library book from still another pocket and crawled under the old-timer.

An hour later Billy came out from under, brushed himself off, and sang out to Eddy, "I 'll be back in a little while."

"You 'd better get that car out of our barn," said Eddy. "We don't want it cluttered up with a lot of old junk."

"Junk!" cried Billy. "Why that carburetor alone is worth ten dollars. They don't make that kind any more." He walked down to Stormville's garage and consulted with his prize friend, Mike O'Dowd, aged sixteen, who had been for four years at the garage.

On hearing Billy's troubles Mike vouchsafed: "Oh, I know that bus. I 've worked on it." He remembered having washed it. "What 'd you pay for it?" he asked. Billy

told him. "Well, you paid four ninety-nine too much," said Mike; "and next time you buy a car you ask me about it first." However, he agreed for friendship's sake to take a look at the car that afternoon, and try to get Billy out of the mess he had got into. On Mike's recommendation Billy parted with seventy-five cents for two gallons of gasolene and a quart of oil.

Billy, at the bursting-point, went home to a late dinner. He got a warm welcome—from Napoleon, who, by making himself flat, somehow slid into the house and sat beside Billy while he ate his cold meal.

"What have you been up to?" demanded Jimmy.

"Buying an automobile," answered Billy, between gulps .

"Now, don't you get fresh with me," warned Jimmy, who had spent his first morning at the cannery office and was not in a pleasant mood. "Get away from my shoes, you miserable pup," he roared at Napolean, who liked nothing better than a good chew of leather.

"Napoleon, come here," ordered Billy.

"Don't you touch that beastly blacking. It 'll make you sick."

Jimmy searched for something to say that would give him the upper hand in the conversation. "You 'd better row that boat around to Uncle James's or he 'll be in your wool," he flung out.

"That boat 's sold," said Billy.

"Sold! Mama! Come here!" Euphemia appeared at the dining-room door, a bundle of wet knives and forks held in a dish-towel in her hands. "Billy 's sold Uncle James's boat," announced Jimmy.

"You were right there when he gave me that boat, and you know very well it was mine," said Billy hotly.

"Billy Clintock," ordered Euphemia, "you go and get that boat this afternoon and take it right over to Uncle James. I don't care whether he gave it to you or whether he did n't. He wants it back, and it 's his boat."

"If Uncle James wants that boat he can go and get it from Mr. Brown," said Billy, rising and folding up his napkin at arm's length.

"Nice way you 're bringing up that kid!"

exploded Jimmy. "Nothing 'll be safe around this town any more."

"Well, I 've got business to attend to," said Billy. "Come on, Napoleon," and he walked out, Napoleon prancing around him.

Mike and Billy spent the afternoon working over the car. Finally, to Billy's breathless joy, it rolled out of the barn under its own power. Through the streets of Stormville it went, and a little way into the country, with Mike at the wheel and Billy beside him, holding his breath. Pointing out that authoritative instruction made all the difference in after-life, Mike taught Billy to drive. Billy took to it like a duck to water. So did Napoleon, who kept up such a continuous barking that he took the place of the horn on the tally-ho. The fact that Billy Clintock had an automobile was well advertised in Stormville and its environs.

On the way back Billy sighted his two second cousins, Henrietta and Wilhelmina. They were fluffy little girls of his own age, given to giggling and whispering. Billy had no particular love for them, but he drew up at

the curb and invited them to come for a ride, with something of a flourish.

"My goodness, Billy," giggled Wilhelmina, the leader, "do you think we 'd go out in that old thing?"

Billy pushed down his hand-brake and left them without a word. When he reached home he saw Uncle James and Jimmy just entering the house. Billy drove slowly to the barn and stopped. He got down and opened the barn doors. Uncle James and Jimmy walked up to Billy, Euphemia, who had caught sight of them, hurrying after.

"I hear you sold my boat," thundered Uncle James.

"Your boat? I sold my boat," said Billy. "And I got this car with part of the money."

"You 'll find that car has cost you more than you think," roared Uncle James. "A boy that would steal a boat—"

Billy whirled round. "If you say I stole that boat again I 'll make you prove it!" he flared. "I saw a lawyer to-day."

Uncle James looked startled. "I 'm not

going to say anything more about it," he said. "But don't ever expect a cent from me. I 'm through with you." He turned on his heel and waddled away. Napoleon barked at the retreating figure, wagging his tail furiously at the same time.

"Billy Clintock!" cried Euphemia. "See what you 've done! You 've not only ruined yourself, you might ruin the whole family! And don't think for a moment we 're going to let you keep that car in the barn—"

William Clintock, coming home from work, walked up to the car with mild curiosity. "What have you got there, Billy?" he asked.

"Papa, can I keep this car in the barn?" demanded Billy.

"Why, yes, if you can get it in," agreed his father. "Will it run?"

"I 'll take you out for a ride to-morrow," said Billy, by way of answer.

"Have n't you any sense, William?" cried his wife. "I 've told Billy he can't keep the car. He bought it with the money he got from selling James's boat?"

"You did n't get much for the boat, did you, Billy?" observed William Clintock.

"I can keep it, can't I?" demanded Billy.

"No!" cried his mother. "Billy 's trying to ruin the whole family, and you, like a fool, stand up for him. If it was n't for you I 'd be in Europe now—"

The words had a familiar sound. William Clintock turned to go, drawing the newspaper from his pocket. But before he went he remarked gently, "Well, I guess we 'll let the car stay." It was the first time in years he had taken a stand against his wife.

And so Billy and his car became familiar sights in the streets of Stormville. It was in the days before such formalities as licenses for drivers had been thought of. After a few days Billy decided to start a bus-line between the station and the inn where summer people stayed; but business was dull, especially after several of his patrons had finished the trip on foot. The cost of gasolene curtailed pleasure-trips, except when Billy's crowd rented the car and Billy's services at enough to pay for gasolene and oil.

Jimmy's attitude toward the car was derisive. He referred to it as the rat-trap, and spread tales about it around town. One of these tales was overheard by a stranger, with interesting consequences.

Billy was in the barn one day, painting a bookcase, when a stranger appeared at the door. He seemed to be a man of assurance, and he smoked a large cigar. Said he: "I hear you've got an old car around here. Want to sell it, Bub?"

Billy recovered enough to say: "Well, I don't know. It 's a pretty good car." And he led the way to his treasure.

"Will it run?" asked the man.

"How far do you want to go?" asked Billy tentatively.

"A hundred feet 'll be all right," answered the man unexpectedly. He looked over the car with deep interest. Billy was surprised. He did not seem like the kind that would want such an *old* car. "I 'll give you twenty-five dollars for it, Bub," he said suddenly, and pulled the money from his pocket. Billy accepted it in a daze.

"Will you run it down for me?" asked the man. "Take it to the new cinematograph studio out on the sea road."

"I 'll take it right over there now," agreed Billy. "Do you want to ride in it?"

"No, thank you," said the man emphatically, adding: "I 've got to hurry. I 'll walk."

Next day Billy again went over his accounts. They stood:

ASSETS

| | |
|---|---|
| Cash [His bus-line had more than covered his gasolene expenses.] | $43.52 |
| 1 bicycle [Billy looked over the wheel and again put it down at] | 10.00 |
| 1 lawn-mower [Billy had not been able to dispose of that and so he reduced it to] | 2.50 |
| 1 bookcase | 2.00 |
| Packing boxes | .45 |
| 1 sled [it was still summer] | .10 |
| Skates | 1.00 |
| Total | 59.55 |

## LIABILITIES

[Billy did not know what liabilities were, but he had looked over a bookkeeping manual and found that they were an essential part of accounts.]

1 busted window that I 've got to fix 50 cents

The liabilities being deducted from the assets, Billy discovered that he was worth $59.05.

## CHAPTER III

### UNCLE JAMES'S HEALTH CONTINUES TO BE EXCELLENT

ALTHOUGH Billy remained in the Clintock family group, he was no longer one of them. He appeared at meal-times, bringing with him a first-rate appetite, but disappeared immediately afterward. Usually he went to the barn and tinkered with this and that. At fourteen, he even moved his room to the barn, glorying in his plain wood walls and quiet. Euphemia decided that Billy was "queer." He was, she reluctantly admitted, not a Peters. He was not even mild and inoffensive, like his father. There was in him what she described as a "cantankerous" streak. He and Jimmy did not get along very well, but they seldom saw each other except at meals.

Jimmy grew up in his uncle's business. At

twenty-two he was where he should have been at sixteen, scraping along on twelve dollars a week, and heartily wishing that Uncle James's end would come soon. In Uncle James's presence he was respectful, almost self-effacing. Behind his back he clenched his hands and swore revenge. If only he had not been desperately afraid of being left out of Uncle James's will, he would have wiped the dust of Stormville from his feet and made for New York long before, but he had followed the gleam of Uncle James's wealth too long to forsake it now that Uncle James was growing pleasantly older and obviously nearer the grave. So Jimmy contented himself with making the best figure he could in Stormville, pressing his clothes at night in his mother's kitchen and showing Euphemia how to remake a necktie by turning it inside out. He went in for respectability, frequenting Stormville's most substantial houses and relieving the boredom of life by a few unfastidious affairs with one or two of the less respectable girls who worked at the cannery.

At nineteen Billy was coldly scornful of

his brother, and quite as scornful, though a little more warmly, of his mother. His sister Martha he found a good plain girl with better common sense and sounder character than Jimmy or Euphemia, but without the force to break away from the family obsession, Uncle James. Under her uncle's guidance Martha had studied stenography and gone into the office of the cannery, where she was getting all of eight dollars a week. Jimmy kept away from her as much as possible. He did not feel that this chunky, solid girl who worked in an office was any particular credit to him. As for Billy, he was a positive disgrace. Jimmy was rather glad of that, but Euphemia never failed to grieve over the errors of her younger son. And the bitter part of it was that Billy, with his admirable physique and good looks, might have been a real Clintock asset. As it was, he was nothing but a mechanic, fussing all day over old automobiles and old motor-boats that he bought in the autumn from the summer people and sold back to them in the spring. Billy

had proved utterly unworthy of his Peters ancestry.

Billy's father had given up all interest in his own personal problems by the time Billy was nineteen. He would ponder on the question of the world's fuel supply and let the fire go out. He thought more about the finances of the railways than about his own finances. His slippers and the newspaper were all that William asked from life. When he tried, infrequently, to look back and see if he had made the most of his talents, he grew a little confused, told himself that he had done the best he could, and stopped thinking about it. After all, Jimmy and Martha were pretty sure to inherit a big slice of Uncle James's money—perhaps all of it if those beastly children of Bessie's would break their necks —and, as for Billy, he seemed pretty well able to take care of himself. He was not going to amount to a lot, of course, but, after all, it did not much matter. He would probably be able to afford slippers and the newspaper by the time he reached old age. Once

in a while William Clintock would shuffle out to the barn and sit and watch Billy's strong fingers cut and saw and mend. Billy was not slipshod about anything. He measured everything to the hair, cut things clean, fitted them neatly. His father could not help admiring Billy. Billy reminded him of his own dimly remembered grandfather, old Silas Clintock, who had been a builder and left scores of well built houses around Stormville as monuments to his professional integrity. Billy always liked to hear about old Silas.

Billy seemed to have acquired a good many contraptions during the last few years. He had a good lathe over in the corner, and some good-looking tools. After all Billy was a smart boy. And he was generous—made his mother a big allowance for his board. It must be taking about all the boy made.

Billy had grown into a tall, silent youth. His hair was dark and thick, his eyes brown, his eyelashes long and dark. His features were not bad. When he smiled he was something of a stunner. His smile came suddenly,

like sunlight bursting from behind a cloud. He had good clear color, good teeth, and a sound body. He looked happy enough, but not any too happy. Billy got along all right, but sometimes he felt lonely.

Cousin Bessie's children continued to be the thorn in the Clintock flesh. Randolph, Henrietta, and Wilhelmina pestered Euphemia as Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar pestered Job. At times Euphemia felt that she would like to curse Uncle James and die, but she clung on. The worst of it was that Bessie had gone her one better. She had stuck like a burr to James without sacrificing her children on his altar, as Euphemia had. Standing before her mirror as she did her hair, Euphemia went over the situation each morning. On the days when her pale reddish hair was done into a hard round knot, it could have been deduced that Bessie had put one over on her. As time went on Euphemia's hair became more strained and tightened, and her mouth as it held the hair-pins seemed like a steel trap. The fact that Euphemia saw herself in the glass each morning as she

thought of Bessie, saw herself growing old and bitter, increased her fury. For every new wrinkle she held Bessie responsible, Bessie who was still softly plump, and whose voice had a caressing quality that the average weak-minded man could not resist. "And Lord knows," thought Euphemia, "James is weak-minded!"

Henrietta and Wilhelmina had grown up plump and golden like their mother. They had pretty, pointed chins and dimpled pink cheeks. Randolph was no beauty, but he had distinction—and brains. Of course Billy had brains, too, but he did not know how to use them.

Randolph had had sense enough to stay out of Uncle James's business. He had gone through college, specializing in mathematics, and had been wily enough, Euphemia thought, to keep on the right side of Uncle James while he kept out of his business. Randolph had kept on going up until he had become an assistant professor in astronomy in an Eastern college. He was far enough away from Uncle James to keep from quarreling with

him, but near enough to come home during the summer holidays and make himself thick with his mighty relative. Randolph had adopted a great many new-fangled ideas in college, but he had sense enough not to let Uncle James know it. And so Uncle James —Bessie's children always called him Uncle instead of Cousin, thereby infringing on the one right Euphemia's children had left— Uncle James admired Randolph, even looked up to him. Randolph threw off a certain impression of careless grace that hypnotized Stormville. He was what Jimmy tried to be, and more; for Jimmy's aspirations never went beyond clothes and parlor graces, while Randolph was gaining a country-wide reputation for his brilliant astronomical studies.

Henrietta and Wilhelmina had not studied stenography and gone into the office of the cannery. Not much! While poor Martha was grinding away in the heat of the summer with the smell of fish eternally sickening her, she would see Henrietta and Wilhelmina go sailing by in one of the dashing little runabouts that the city boys brought up to Storm-

ville. And, instead of being disgusted with them, Uncle James seemed only to admire them the more for being such fetching little things. He had never even suggested that they study stenography. Bessie had hinted at Etta's delicate heart and Mina's nervousness when the time had come when it might be supposed that the girls would earn their bread. It was only when she felt that James had become adjusted to the idea that his little cousins were only meant for ornament that Bessie quietly permitted Etta's heart to improve, and did away with Mina's nerves. However, she was always ready to bring them back at a moment's notice. But it turned out that Uncle James never talked office work to the girls at all. As a matter of fact, he was proud of the dashing little beauties, and fatly pleased to squeeze their plump little arms and accept their tempestuous kisses.

All his life James had been a bachelor, technically speaking. And when Euphemia was not thinking about Bessie's little wretches she was flaying herself with the thought that

James might get married. Indeed, on this point Euphemia and Bessie were united. Whenever a potential sister-in-law appeared in Stormville Euphemia would twist up her hair like a knot of rope and dash over to Bessie's, there to lay plans to foil the designing woman who had her eye on dear James. And Euphemia would make transparent efforts to undermine the adventuress, calling James's attention to her evil designs, while Bessie, with her greater diplomacy, would show up the snake in the grass by innocently remarking on its beautiful scales and interesting capacity for wriggling. And, all unwitting, James would have his fat hand unclasped from his prize and his attention gently turned in another direction. She was a masterly woman, Bessie.

Of course Euphemia and Bessie were quite right in supposing that any one who was willing to marry James was after his money. No one could possibly want to marry him for himself. At sixty his fat had become flabby, his hair so thin that he could scarcely part it, his face had sagged, his teeth turned

brown, and his eyes grown small and sharp. If he had ever studied himself impartially he might have wondered a little at the devotion he aroused in Henrietta and Wilhelmina. He might have doubted their statements that he was the dearest thing in the world, and a perfect angel, and wondered why it was that they were so ready to leave an evening of beaus and mandolins on the pier to sit on Uncle James's piazza and hear him tell how he had undersold Wilson of Bridgewater and put him out of business. And when he kissed them good night, the little warm perfumed things, he might, had he realized what manner of man he was, have noticed that they had to steel themselves to endure and return his caresses. But that was only at first. After a few summers of moonlight and mandolins, Henrietta and Wilhelmina grew less fastidious and gave themselves up to anybody's kiss like ascetics who had changed their philosophy and decided to wallow in luxury. Their mother did not know it, of course. She had acted in the same way when she was young, but it never occurred to her that her daugh-

ters' dainty white slippers were tracing her footsteps.

Uncle James's visits to the Clintocks became more and more infrequent. There was nothing to lure him there except lemon-pies, and he could get those elsewhere. Euphemia's voice did not caress him when she spoke to him, though she tried hard to make it. Jimmy was a nincompoop and a source of irritation to James, because James knew that Jimmy's salary was unreasonably low. Martha was a lump, who knew nothing outside the business and too much of that to make her uncle feel entirely comfortable. She never said anything, but sometimes she would look at her uncle with her large cow-like eyes as though she did not entirely approve of him. Of course William was a stick and of no interest to James, and, as for Billy, he was the worst of the lot, an out-and-out rebel. Uncle James grew to hate Billy as vindictively as Billy hated him.

It was after one of Uncle James's infrequent visits that Billy got to talking to Martha as he helped her dry the dishes. Euphemia

had gone to bed with a sick headache, the invariable finale of an evening with her brother. Jimmy had dutifully walked home with his uncle, and William Clintock had relapsed into a peaceful sleep before the fire with the relaxation of one who had gone through an unavoidable ordeal and earned repose.

"What do you think of Uncle James?" asked Billy suddenly, polishing off a platter.

Martha hesitated before she answered. Her years at the office had made caution a habit. Billy was all the more surprised, then, when after her hesitation she burst out with "I hate him!"

"Well, then," said Billy, "why on earth do you work for him?"

"What 's the use of pretending?" shrugged Martha. "I work for him because I 'm hoping he 'll leave me his money some day. You know that as well as I do."

"Martha," said Billy, "it does n't pay, this business of waiting around for somebody to leave this earth. Why, I waited two years for that fool Simmons to run his motor-boat on a rock so 's I could buy it cheap. And

what did he do? He ran it on a rock in mid-ocean, and it was sunk, and the only thing that was saved was Simmons. Well, I was glad of that, anyway. I sold him the boat I bought from him three years before. He did n't even know it was the same boat."

"I 'm not going to waste all my years of work at this late date," said Martha sullenly.

Billy looked closely at his sister as he would have looked at a motor-boat that some one wanted him to buy. He had lived alone so much that he had never known Martha well. Now she appeared to him in a new light. Martha was not so bad after all. If she could be done over, repaired, put in shape—

"Martha," he said, "you 're on the wrong track. You 're in the clutch of the family curse. The Uncle James idea has hypnotized this family so much that we never stop and think where we 're going."

"I know where I 'm going, all right," said Martha bitterly. "I told you exactly why I was working for Uncle James at nothing a week. I did n't try to hedge."

Billy changed his tactics. "Martha," he

said, "you 're not so bad looking." It was a pretty strong compliment for Billy, but he felt that the occasion required it.

Martha laughed, but she seemed softened. A smile touched her lips for a second as though she were remembering something. But it left instantly. "You don't suppose," she said, "that after waiting for Uncle James to die all these years I 'm going to give up now that he 's all ready for the grave?"

Billy flinched a little, but he said cheerfully: "You 're frank; I 'll say that for you. Strange that these thoughts should go on behind your passive exterior. I always thought you were simply under the curse and did n't think anything about it." He looked her over again. "What you need," he said, "is plenty of tennis and a nice new red dress and —and—a lover. That would make a new girl of you."

Martha laughed catchily. "A red dress in Uncle James's office! He 'd throw a fit! Wilhelmina and Henrietta can come into the office all dolled up with bright green parasols and roses in their hats, and he pats their hands

by the hour and calls them his little darlings; but I 'm not supposed to be anything but a machine. He raised the roof because—because—I wore a red girdle on my serge dress and I had to—had to—" She broke down sobbing.

Billy clenched his fists. "Martha," he roared, "if you don't get out that red trimming and wear it to-morrow I 'll go around and choke Uncle James. Yes, I will! Take your choice!"

Martha laughed through her tears. "Is that your idea of a threat?" she gurgled. "You can boil him in oil for all I care."

Again Billy contemplated his sister. Martha seemed to have more in her than he had supposed. "Look here, Martha," he urged, "give up that rotten job and go away to Boston or New York or somewhere and begin to live. This business of waiting for some one to die and leave you their money is the biggest fake proposition that was ever invented. Here you are, here the whole lot of the Clintocks and Cousin Bessie's kids, too, are, sitting around like vultures waiting for

Uncle James to die. It 's not dignified, Martha. We 're all ordinary, healthy human beings, and we ought to be living our own lives and making our own money instead of kowtowing to a beastly old reprobate and giving up our lives—our entire lives—to doing the fool things he wants us to do. You and Jimmy would be 'way along this day if it had n't been for Uncle James. And Cousin Bessie's kids might be real women instead of damned little flirts if they 'd ever been given any idea of hustling for their money instead of picking it off Uncle James's corpse. Martha, this whole family ought to be repaired and set straight, and you 're the one to begin on. Won't you be a real woman and shake your fist in Uncle James's face?"

"But there 's Mother," sighed Martha. "She 's given up her whole life to getting us in with Uncle James and Cousin Bessie's children out. You 've been a disappointment to her; she feels you 've wasted your opportunities, and she 's afraid Jimmy is n't as thick with Uncle James as he was, and she 's pinning all her hopes on me. I don't want to

disappoint her at the last minute when she 's worked so hard all these years and given up her life to the one idea of making us comfortable in the future."

"Martha," said Billy grimly, "I want to ask you this: if you 'd known when you were fifteen that at twenty-one you 'd still be working for a song at the cannery and Uncle James would still be alive and healthy, *would* you have started in?"

"No, I don't suppose I would have," admitted Martha.

"And now think of yourself six years from now, at twenty-seven, still slaving away there on the merry hope that Uncle James is going to die. That 's what you 'll be doing, as like as not. Uncle James is vicious enough to live for ever. By twenty-seven you 'll have lost twice as much in salary as Uncle James will ever leave you if he leaves you anything at all, and you 'll be old and crotchety and unmarried. For the love of Heaven, give it up, Martha. I bet you 'd be married to-day if it had n't been for Uncle James's delayed departure."

The color slowly came into Martha's face. "Billy," she said, "if I tell you something, will you swear you 'll never tell?" Billy promised. "There 's some one now," said Martha, "who wants to marry me."

"Well, I never!" was Billy's uncomplimentary reception of the news. "Who is it?"

"Paul Street—the boss in the cannery."

"Good!" cried Billy. "He 's all right. I always liked that chap. He 's got a good head for business, too."

"But, Billy," protested Martha, "I could n't possibly marry him. He 's not in our class."

"He 's in mine," said Billy stoutly, "if he would n't think me presumptuous to say so."

"Billy," said Martha, with something of her mother's accent. "You know grandfather—"

"Was a Peters," said Billy solemnly.

"Well," Martha went on, "I could n't marry him, anyhow. He 's going to leave the cannery and start one of his own because he can't stand Uncle James. Uncle James will be furious. If I should marry Paul,"

she ended solemnly, "Uncle James would n't leave us a cent when he dies."

"When that blessed day comes," said Billy dramatically, "your brother may be twice a millionaire. Transfer your obsession to me, Martha. Let Uncle James die in peace and spend your time calculating how much longer I 've got to live."

"Billy, you 're horrid," said Martha.

"Martha, you 're a half-baked idiot," said Billy. "You pin that red business Uncle James objected to on your dress to-morrow and come back engaged to Paul. Do you hear?"

## CHAPTER IV

### BILLY RESCUES A BASKET—AND A LADY

"THAT car is as good to-day as when it left the factory. I 've been over every inch of it, and I 've put it in perfect shape. It was bought originally at eight hundred dollars, and it 's worth five hundred to-day at the very least. The man who sold it to me practically chucked it away rather than take the trouble to get it into shape. All it needed was new piston-rings and the carbon removed and a few little things like that. I 'll guarantee that car, Mr. Willing, just as if it were a new car, and if you have any trouble with it this summer due to faulty workmanship I 'll repair it free and give you a new part if it 's needed."

The prospect walked around the car. "It looks all right to me," he admitted, "but I

must confess I don't know much about cars. Do you want to take my old car in part payment?"

"I 'm interested in anything on wheels, Mr. Willing," said Billy. "I 'll be glad to take it home with me and look it over if you like, and I 'll leave this car here while you 're deciding whether you want it." Willing agreed, and Billy marked down another sale to his credit. He knew Willing was going to take that car, and he was getting a bargain, too.

"I say—er—Clintock," Mr. Willing called, as Billy started the engine of Willing's old car. "I 'm looking for a little motor-boat—not anything very expensive. Think you can fix me up?"

"I should n't wonder, Mr. Willing," drawled Billy, thinking over his present line of boats. "Now, there 's one little humdinger I got hold of last year that ought to suit you. I 'll bring her over in the morning." Billy moved off, his mind on the boat. He had had a good week, one of his best. He had sold three cars and two motor-boats without count-

ing the ones Mr. Willing was going to buy. In each case he had sold at more than 100 per cent. profit, and, at that, he had given generous value. Billy's resources were getting sizable, but his bank-account was small. He never let his money lie idle. Virtually all of it was invested, and some of his investments were doing nobly. The family did not know of Billy's flourishing financial condition, and Billy decided that it was just as well. As it was, all the money he gave his mother for board seemed to go for Christmas and birthday presents for Uncle James. As for Jimmy and Martha, it was better for them not to count on another rich relation. Billy did not want to be a second Uncle James.

Martha had not said anything to Billy about Paul Street since their talk over the dishes, but one evening she had whispered hurriedly: "Billy, I think you were right. I 'm not doing anything for the moment, but there 's going to be an explosion soon." Billy had no qualms over the advice he had given her. He knew that it was sound, that whether or not they lost by it financially the

family ought to break away from their undignified subservience to Uncle James.

Billy turned Willing's car out of town into one of the country roads. There was a farmer up at Chestnut Lands, he understood, who wanted some kind of a second-hand car. He 'd better find out about it.

He bumped over the rough country roads. What a state they were in! He 'd like to go in for mending roads. He was glad he had invested in that road-material company. There were enough poor roads in the country to keep them busy a million years. Unconsciously, as he went along, he listened to the heavy breathing of the engine, the sound of the fan, the squeaks in the body. He was absent-mindedly diagnosing his patient.

A sharp cry broke through the sounds of the car. Some one was calling for help ahead of him. Billy shot on the gas. Again the cry came, at his side now. The view was cut off by bushes. The car slid to a standstill, and Billy leapt out. He ran to a clear place in the fence.

So steeled for battle was Billy that when he

saw what was up he leaned over the fence and in his reaction roared with laughter. It was the fatally wrong course. Persis did not mind being laughed at under ordinary circumstances, but when she was up a tree with a bull pawing the ground beneath her the laughter of a strange young man at the other side of the fence struck her as inopportune.

"Why don't you *do* something?" she cried indignantly. Billy immediately did something. He had stopped laughing, and his expression had changed, but not because of the treed lady's reproof. What he did—and again it was quite the wrong thing—was to leap over the fence and, in imminent danger of attracting the bull's attention, speed to a camera and basket that had evidently been discarded by the imperiled lady in her precipitous flight. Billy brought them back to the fence and safety. Yes, it was quite the wrong thing to do. Persis, having followed his actions with lively interest, now commented upon them with heat.

"Well, of all idiotic things!" she ex-

claimed. "What in the name of common sense did you do *that* for?"

"It 's a good camera," said Billy, a little indignantly. "The bull might have stepped on it."

Persis would have stamped her foot if both feet had not been dangling in the air. "Go and get somebody to come and shoot that bull," she ordered.

Again Billy was a little indignant. "Shoot that bull?" he cried. "Why it 's a good bull. It 's worth two hundred and fifty dollars."

"A good bull!" cried Persis. "Why he 's as vicious as he can be! I did n't do a thing but take a picture of the landscape, and he came tearing at me like a cyclone."

"Maybe he was just trying to play with you," suggested Billy. Persis would have then and there walked away in dignified silence if circumstances had permitted. As it was, she inquired whether Billy was going to sit there all day. Billy concentrated on the basket and—ye gods!—began to mend it. "I guess I 'll think of a way to get you down

soon," he said, "but it 's no use starting anything until you have all your plans ready."

"Do you expect me to stay here for a week?" demanded Persis. "It 's perfectly clear what you ought to do. Take the bull away!"

"I was just coming to that," said Billy, and was surprised to hear himself add, "only then I would n't have a chance to talk to you any longer."

"Look here," said the girl, " will you go and telephone Mr. Randolph Kelsey? He 'll get me down."

Billy stopped fooling in a hurry. She was asking for Cousin Bessie's Randolph! Billy had not been brought up in rivalry to Cousin Bessie's children without getting some of it into his system. He 'd show her he could be as good a knight errant as Randolph! He picked up a stick, jumped over the fence, and rushed at the bull. He knew that bull, and it was not particularly vicious. If the girl had not been wearing a red dress the bull probably would not have chased her. The bull gave way a few feet, and Billy followed up his attack with a stone or two. The bull

galloped away for several yards and turned again, his head lowered, his hoofs pawing the grass.

"Beat it for the fence next time he turns his back," yelled Billy as he passed the tree. Again he got the bull on the run. He heard the girl scrambling down from the tree. Turning his head quickly, he saw that she had almost reached the fence. He sent one more stone after the bull for good measure, and turned and ran.

It seemed only a second before he heard the bull snorting behind him, encouraged by the enemy's retreat. If Billy had not stumbled on the rough ground he would have had plenty of time to reach the fence. As it was, the bull was almost upon him when he scrambled up. The fence was a good ten yards away. Billy swerved suddenly and jumped for the low branches of the tree the girl had just left. He swung himself up and sat panting in the branches.

That certainly was a giggle coming from the other side of the fence. Yes, the girl in red was laughing at him! In a second

Billy's breath came back to him. "How do you happen to know Randolph Kelsey?" he asked, as though there had been no interruption in the conversation.

"Through Uncle James Peters," answered the girl.

Only the peril below kept Billy from falling from the tree. "Don't tell me you 're a victim to the Uncle James idea!" he cried, adding solemnly: "How does James Peters happen to be your uncle when he 's mine, too? *Are* you my long lost sister?"

The girl shook her head. "He is n't really my uncle," she explained, "but Father wants me to call him that."

"I see," said Billy darkly, "your father will be glad to know that Uncle James is in the best of health, hale and hearty—good for twenty years. You 're not thinking of going into Uncle James's office, are you?"

"Of course not," returned the girl. "I 'm not so crazy over Mr. Peters as you seem to be."

"I 've got to come down and shake hands

with you for that," said Billy. The bull had begun to eat grass as though the conversation bored him. "Walk, don't run, to the nearest exit," murmured Billy, as he let himself down and walked mechanically to the fence. The bull seemed to have lost interest in Billy. He looked up tentatively but went back to his grass.

Billy climbed the fence and held out his hand. "I 'm Billy Clintock," he said. "May I take you home in the machine?" The girl put her hand in his big palm. "Thanks awfully for saving my life," she said. "My name 's Persis Hamilton. Yes, do take me home. We 're staying at the inn."

He helped her into the car and put the camera and basket on the floor. "I 'll take you around by the shore road," he suggested. It was several miles longer, but the girl did not object. "Do you live here?" she asked.

"Very much so," assented Billy. "I 've always lived here." He became silent, suddenly shy. He had not been afraid of the girl before, but she seemed more remote here

beside him than she had been when she was up the tree. She was a little blue-eyed slip of a thing, slight, but not fragile. Her face was delicately square, her mouth inclined to be firm, her eyes not incapable of provocative glances. She had undulating hair, fair but darkened by shadows. Altogether she was a little beauty. Billy stepped on the gas. Why had he let himself in for the shore road? He could not handle a situation like this. Why, the girl was a nine days' wonder.

Billy had never known a girl well. There had been plenty of them at high school, but not one had stirred him. Since he had left school he had been too busy to bother with girls, anyhow. Suddenly he felt that he 'd like to kiss this girl and then die. The dying seemed necessary because he could never survive the embarrassment of the kiss. He was not in love with her; how could he be when he did not know anything about her? She might be selfish, unreasonable, illogical, not at all the kind of woman he would admire. And yet— Billy gave the car more gas.

"You certainly do speed," remarked the girl.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Billy, slowing down to ten miles.

"A person of extremes," murmured Persis.

"Just what I was thinking," said Billy, and relapsed.

"Well, if you 're not going to talk I suppose I 'll have to keep up the conversation," decided Persis, after a moment's pause. "Probably you 'd like my impressions of Stormville. I find it an unspoiled town of some five thousand souls, situated on the picturesque shores of Massachusetts. The inhabitants are a silent, uncommunicative lot, many of them totally dumb. They are not, however, entirely without interest. They may, perhaps, be described as strong, silent people. They have a passion for salvaging inanimate objects, such as baskets and cameras, but take comparatively little pleasure in saving human life. They have, as a rule, brown eyes, heavy brown hair, and long, long, eyelashes—"

"Look here," said Billy,"that 'll do."

"All of them," continued Persis, "are

related to a certain James Peters, the great mogul of the town—"

"And a total loss," put in Billy.

"My own opinion precisely," agreed Persis, "but his relatives are worth saving. Randolph I find a person of parts."

Billy said nothing.

"He really has brains, you know," prompted Persis, and, as Billy still said nothing, she went on: "He 's a professor at the college where I 'm going this fall. He 's bent on my specializing in astronomy. I think I 'd rather like it."

"I don't know him very well," was Billy's only comment. "How do you come to be so chummy with Uncle James?"

"He owns about all the stock in Father's tin-mine," explained Persis. "I imagine that 's the chief reason. The others are his great personal charm, wit, beauty, all that sort of thing."

Billy grinned.

"The statue comes to life," murmured Persis.

"Look here, Persis," began Billy. He had

been saying the name over to himself, and it came easily to him.

"Who told you you could call me that?" inquired Persis.

"Why, I never thought of calling you anything else," answered Billy in surprise. "You wouldn't have me call you Miss Hamilton—a little kid like you? Any more than you 'd think of calling me Mr. Clintock."

"Well, I *did* think of it," admitted Persis, "but let it be 'Billy.' I suppose after the *mauvais quart d'heure* we spent together—"

Again Billy stepped on the gas. She was a city person. What was the use of trying to be friends with her?

Perhaps Persis read his thoughts. "I hope I 'm going to see more of you," she said humbly. "Would you go so far as to come and see me some day soon?"

"I 'm going over to the inn to-morrow to take a boat to Mr. Willing," said Billy. "I make most of my money selling boats and cars to you city folks."

"Take me out in it first, Billy," begged Persis. She had long since successfully con-

quered the inhibitions of convention, like most of her generation.

"All right," agreed Billy laconically.

"In other words," suggested Persis, "nothing would give you greater pleasure?"

Billy would have been embarrassed at that if she had not said it in a way that made them seem like intimate friends. He looked down at her as though he were about to say something in kind, but suddenly the touch of humor left his face and he merely said superfluously, "Well, here 's the inn."

Persis jumped out on the porch. *"A demain,"* she said, but suddenly added, "See you to-morrow."

"Sure thing," said Billy as he moved away. "Here, don't forget your things." He stopped the car and handed out the camera and basket.

"I don't want the basket," said Persis. "It 's an old thing. I was going to throw it away, anyhow."

Billy looked positively shocked. "Don't you do anything of the kind," he ordered. It 's a good basket—not a thing the matter

with it. You 'll find it 'll come in useful."

Humbly Persis accepted the basket. "I 'll keep empty clam-shells in it," she murmured as she moved away.

## CHAPTER V

### A WORLD OF PEARL

BILLY wore his usual costume, brown corduroy trousers and a flannel shirt, when he appeared at the inn next morning. He found Persis on the veranda, dressed in a white pleated skirt and soft white sweater. Yes, she was as pretty as he remembered her. There were two girls sitting beside her. He did not recognize them until one of them said somewhat patronizingly, "Hello, Billy." Oh, they were Henrietta and Wilhelmina! How different they looked from Persis. He had always thought of them as the regular city girl type, but, sitting next to Persis, they looked suddenly cheap. He had a vague feeling that their clothes were not quite right. Their white skirts did not fit as well as hers, and their shoes had thin high heels, while hers had rubber soles. And their stockings were slightly wrinkled, while

hers were taut. Moreover, their blond hair stuck out too much over their ears, and their very red smiles had no expression. Billy wondered why they were considered such pretty girls.

Persis jumped up and stuffed the greenish-blue thing she was knitting into a basket, the one Billy had rescued the day before.

"Why, you 're not going away," protested Wilhelmina in surprise. "We thought we 'd sit here and talk all morning." Billy noticed that his cousins had no intention of introducing him to Persis, though they evidently thought he had not met her.

"Randolph's coming over in a little while," added Henrietta.

"I 'm sorry—I 'm awfully sorry to miss Randolph," said Persis, and she seemed to mean it. "Tell him to come and see me to-night, won't you? He 's been explaining to me how the world was created, and he left it cooling. I 'd like to get it finished. All, ready, Billy," she smiled at him. "I 'm going out in a boat with Billy," she explained to the girls. "Is he safe?"

To Henrietta and Wilhelmina the news that Persis was going out in a boat with Billy came as a distinct shock. Persis was their prize acquaintance, a wealthy girl from the city who had been to an expensive boarding-school; and they had been embarrassed when their unstylish cousin had appeared on the inn piazza.

"Why, I did n't know you rented boats, Billy," wondered Henrietta, genuinely innocent. Evidently Persis had hired Billy to take her out. But why did n't she ask them to come along?

"This is Billy's party," said Persis hastily, coloring a little in embarrassment. "At least, I made him invite me out in his boat. I'll see you later." She hurried off with Billy. "Don't forget to give Randolph my message," she called back.

Billy told her that he had brought some lunch along and planned an all-day picnic, and so Persis left a message for her father at the desk. It might have alarmed any one unused to Persis. It read:

Have gone off for an indefinite period with a strange man. Won't be back for lunch, anyway.

"Well, what do you know about that?" said Henrietta to Wilhelmina after they had gone.

"Those Clintocks are the limit," said Wilhelmina to Henrietta.

The red motor-boat had been newly cleaned and painted. Otherwise Billy would have told Persis to go back and put on an old dress. As he helped her in, he felt glad that the boat was in good shape. It fitted in with something new and shining about Persis. Persis was used to boats, and got safely on board even though Billy did not hold her hand quite as long as was necessary. He was so afraid of holding it too long.

"I 'll take you to Pine Island," he said briefly.

"Pine Island is the one place above all others that I 've always wanted to go to," declared Persis. She moved to the bow and faced the wind, glorying in the cold salt spray. Her hair blew out in bewildering

curls. Billy was glad it was not held down under a tight net. Now and then she turned to Billy with eager questions, alert to every bird that rested on the waves, every buoy they passed. She always found Billy smiling at her, watching her silently. Never before had Billy taken a girl out on the water. Perhaps he would not sell this little red boat after all.

Pine Island was only a half-mile long, and nobody lived there. Yet into its small space it seemed to have gathered all the tempting bits of rock and bush and tree that that part of the country could produce. On one side was a sandy beach, on the other a curious ledge of smooth pink rock, broken by deep crevices. Inland, the ground was spongy with pine-needles in some places, and in others covered with raspberry and blueberry bushes. Billy picked blueberries as they went along, with spasmodic assistance from Persis. Persis was too much enraptured by the brilliant mushrooms in the woods, the brilliant pebbles on the shore, and the countless intriguing nooks and corners to give her earnest attention to the serious consideration of lunch.

All at once she stopped. "Why, there 's a cabin!" she cried. Before them was a small log-built shack, efficiently padlocked. "I wonder who in the world lives there," marvelled Persis. "I wish we could see inside."

"Perhaps my key will fit," suggested Billy, trying it in the lock. The lock snapped open.

"But we must n't go in," objected Persis. "He would n't like it. I 'll just take one look and then we 'll lock it up again." She stood by the door with Billy and looked in. "Oh, it 's too darling!" she cried. "Yellow walls and two old chairs. And a fireplace; think of it! Look at that enchanting old sea picture. And the pewter porringer! And the rag rug! He must be a dear old sea-captain. I wish he 'd come along and let us go in and poke around."

"Go in and poke around all you like," grinned Billy. "I happen to be the old duffer myself."

"Do you really mean you own it?" rejoiced Persis. She ran in and made herself at home with enchanting impertinence. It was

a simple thing, Billy's cabin, with only a cot and a table for furniture, besides the few chairs, several cups and plates, a book or two, an old sea lamp perched on the shelf that ran around the wall.

Billy looked at the cabin with new eyes. He had always seen it as a haven of peace, but it had not occurred to him that any one else would care for it. Yet Persis was enraptured. She behaved outrageously, however. First she found a broom and swept it out, which was insulting; then she demanded lunch, which was positively rude.

Billy produced a coffee-pot from a cupboard, and forthwith Persis had to investigate the cupboard and rearrange it, with the large cans and packages at the back of the shelf and the little ones in front—another piece of outrageous behavior.

Billy said nothing. He went around smiling to himself and humming a little tune. Perhaps he had not been sufficiently well brought up to realize how badly Persis was acting. As a matter of fact, Billy scarcely knew what he was doing. Persis made him feel pos-

itively light-headed. If he had not had exceptionally well trained hands that went about their business whether his mind was coöperating or not he never would have been able to get the lunch ready at all. As it was, he was surprised to find out that his hands had attended to the clams he had brought with him. They had efficiently rolled them in salted flour and now seemed to be frying them in a frying-pan that they held over the open fire. Billy wondered how the fire had got there, and vaguely remembered having struck a match.

All this time he was going around like a silent, stern man with nothing on his mind but lunch. Persis was not even sure that he cared whether she was there or not. But every time their eyes met and he smiled at her she decided that he did care. When this happened for the fourth time Billy pulled himself together and sternly told himself that he was not to look at Persis again till lunch was ready. And he kept his resolution. Persis felt quite humbled by the time they sat down to fried clams, mushrooms, bread

and butter, coffee with cream, cranberry jelly, and blueberries. And then Billy, being opposite her and with nothing else on his mind, allowed himself to look at Persis. He looked away quickly. She was sitting with her back to the window, a halo of light touching her soft hair. Billy could not bear it. He went back to the clams.

"Billy," said Persis, speaking slowly and deliberately, "I never in all my life have had such a good time."

When lunch was cleared away they sat before the fire on the braided mat and talked till dusk. He found out a good deal about her, how her mother had died when she was only a few years old, and her father had given up all his time to pleasing her and making money for her, so that she could have everything she wanted. "And he doesn't seem to understand, poor Daddy," she sighed, "that the things he strains and struggles to give me aren't always the things I care anything about. I *know* he couldn't afford to send me to Stonebridge Hall, but he *would* do it, because it was the most expensive school he

could find, and he thought therefore it must be the best. And I don't know how I 'll ever get married," she added whimsically. "There 's nobody alive that combines the ridiculous qualities Daddy insists on in his son-in-law. The only boy I know that he likes at all is your cousin Randolph; and that 's only because he 's related to Uncle James, and Uncle James holds Daddy in the palm of his hand. You see Daddy 's the president of the Green Mountain Tin Mine, and Uncle James could put him out in a minute if he felt like it. Not that *I 'd* care, but it would kill Daddy." She grew silent, her eyes on the fire. "How did you happen to have this house here?" she asked at last.

"Oh, I thought I 'd like to get away from —Uncle James now and then," explained Billy; "I suppose you know the feeling. So I bought this island for almost nothing and put up the house myself. Sometimes I spend a week here. By the way," he remembered, "please don't tell about it. I do quite a lot of things my people don't know about."

"Why don't you tell them?" she asked.

He explained, not without difficulty. It was a little hard to tell her some of it, especially as Stormville standards forbade one to discuss one's family, but he sketched in some of his home background. "For one thing I 'm not of age," he told her. "I 'm only nineteen, and if they knew I 'd saved up a little—a few thousands—they might have something to say about the way I spent it. That is, Uncle James would have something to say. And, as for Jimmy and Martha, it 's better for them to stand on their own feet and earn their own money."

She thought that over for a moment. "Do you know what I 'm going to do?" she mused. "While I 'm in college I 'm going to specialize in some subject so that I can support myself. This Uncle James business has made me feel how criminal it is to be dependent on other people. I 'm really going to definitely try to fit myself for some special work. Then maybe Daddy won't worry so when Uncle James gets edgy." Her attention centered on Uncle James. "One thing I will *not* do is

kiss that man good-by. It 's all I can do to call him Uncle James, though I feel better about that now that I know you. But when those Kelsey girls fawn upon him it makes me shudder." Her thoughts wandered in the direction of Henrietta and Wilhelmina. "You know those girls can't touch their brother. Randolph really has distinction—and brains. I wish I could have astronomy the first semester."

Billy threw another log on the fire. Happily it was driftwood studded with copper nails, and it blazed into green and violet glory. "That 's what you 're like," he said suddenly. "Or like an opal—sort of strange and misty but full of color." He stopped himself. He knew now that he loved her, but he was not going to tell her so. Probably she would never dream that such a thing was possible. So little did Billy know of women.

They did not go home until Persis's dormant sense of propriety aroused itself, and even then they went as slowly as possible through a world of pearl. Sea and sky,

faintly tinged with color, melted together in the suggestion of mist on the horizon.

David Hamilton was used to the ways of his independent daughter. If he had not spent the afternoon with James Peters he would merely have told her, when she came home late to dinner, that she ought to have been home long ago and that he had been uneasy about her. But James Peters had heard from Henrietta and Wilhelmina that Persis had gone out in a boat with Billy Clintock, and he had not hesitated to give Hamilton a brief sketch of his young nephew, such a sketch as could not have been used in an obituary notice. Accordingly Hamilton had been more than vaguely uneasy. He had been seriously troubled.

He met Persis and Billy at the dock, and, with only the briefest recognition of his daughter's introduction, began the speech he had been preparing for her for several hours. It lasted until they reached the inn, and it was repeated with additions after dinner. He told Persis that she was an inexperienced

girl, living in a cloud of rosy idealism, that she would have been more strictly looked after if her mother had lived, and that he had come to realize his folly in allowing her to run wild. "When my friends begin to notice it," he said, "it 's time I woke up and did my duty. I 'm not blaming you, Persis. It 's my own fault entirely. I have n't had sense enough to realize that I can't bring up my daughter as I was brought up."

Persis saw that her father's indignation would only be fanned by argument. Even when he direly hinted that perhaps a year or two in a French convent would give her a needed idea of correct behavior, she did not protest. She knew that only the keenest sense of neglected responsibility would induce her father to send her so far away, and that he was far from being screwed up firmly enough to carry out his threat.

Billy had not been dampened by Mr. Hamilton's cold reception. Indeed, he had hardly realized that Mr. Hamilton was there. Persis took up the entire foreground

of his consciousness. He was too happy to think of anything else.

Like water rolling from a duck's back, the scolding passed over Persis and left her untouched. Of course poor Daddy thought he ought to lecture her; all proper-minded parents felt it their duty to reprove their children whenever the children showed any sprouts of ideas or conduct that differed in any way from the opinions and behavior of their parents. But there! Daddy would have forgotten all about it in the morning, and only be distressed if she had taken his words too much to heart.

Out of consideration for her parent, therefore, Persis skipped from the shadow of his disapproval and settled down to thinking about Billy. She thought him all over, from his long eyelashes that had such an enchanting curl in them, a bit of beauty of which Billy was completely unaware, to his sudden shynesses, his natural instinct to keep himself to himself. Persis knew that she could make Billy fall in love with her. Perhaps it would be the first time he had been in love. She rather thought so.

Persis sought the silence and shade of a remote end of the piazza. She wanted to be by herself and think of Billy. She was not even trying to keep tight hold of the reins. She was falling in love overwhelmingly, gloriously, as one does at seventeen.

## CHAPTER VI

### "FIVE YEARS FROM NOW"

MARTHA came home from the office one afternoon, her eyes shining with excitement. "It 's coming—the explosion," she whispered to Billy. Instead of being frightened, she seemed to be looking forward to the crash she was going to make. Martha had been kept in the background all her life, and it was only natural that she should welcome the opportunity of taking the center of the stage.

She waited until after supper was over and the dishes cleared away. Instead of making for the barn or some grove near the edge of the water where he could think of Persis, Billy hung around to see what was going to happen. Martha went into the living-room and took a stand with her back to the bookcase. Her mother sat sewing at one side of the table; her father, in his slippers, read his

newspaper at the other side. Jimmy lay on the sofa, tired out after a hard day at the cannery. Billy leaned tentatively against the door-jamb opposite Martha, waiting for things to happen.

"I 've something to tell you," began Martha. The announcement brought instant attention. It was not usual for a member of the family to stand up before them and make a remark like that. Euphemia put down her sewing and took off her glasses, the better to see Martha. William looked up over his paper. Jimmy shifted his position so that he could look at his sister. Martha felt elated, like an actress who had caught hold of her audience.

It seemed like a new Martha that the family faced. Her dullness, almost sogginess, was gone. She was clumsy-looking still, and her shoes bulged ungracefully, but there was life in her face. Her color was brilliant. Her eyes shone. She was vivid, magnetic.

"I want to tell you," she said, "that I 'm engaged to Paul Street. We 're going to be married *at once.*"

Breaking over her husband's undercurrent of "Well, well, well!" Euphemia dashed out with "What do you mean?" Jimmy sat up, his hair rumpled, his eyes blinking. "For the Lord's sake, Martha, you 're crazy. Street 's only a cannery hand, and Uncle James is down on him, at that."

"And I don't care," flung out Martha, "two cents for Uncle James!" It was the same sentiment that Billy had expressed years before. It had taken Martha longer to come to Billy's conclusion, but, once she had reached it, she was there to stay.

"This is Billy's doing!" cried Euphemia.

Billy left the door-jamb and walked over to Martha, holding out his hand. "Congratulations," he said, "Paul 's a peach." Martha took his hand gratefully. They were partners, never so close together as at this moment.

"There! I knew it!" cried Euphemia. "Billy, you 'll ruin us yet! What will Uncle James say? You know he won't stand for it," and, with a quick realization of the right place to attack, she added, "He 'll discharge Paul Street; that 's what he 'll do!"

"Paul's going to-morrow, anyhow," said Martha calmly, "and so am I. He 's slaved long enough for Uncle James, and he 's going to start a business of his own. I know the office work of a cannery, and Paul knows the mechanical end. And between us we 're going to start a business that will be a real business, and," she added significantly, "that 's going to last."

"Well, well, well!" said William Clintock.

"Bully for you!" cried Billy.

"Jimmy," cried Euphemia wildly, "you 're all I 've got left."

Jimmy fell back on the sofa. "I 'm dished," he said. "You don't suppose Uncle James will have me around after my sister 's done a thing like that."

"You 'd be better off if you left him, Jimmy," said Billy earnestly. "I tell you as I 've told you before, you 're wasting your whole life hanging on to that old skinflint."

Euphemia burst into tears. "There, that 's what children are," she sobbed. "We mothers wear ourselves out caring for them

and struggling for their future, and then they ruin you in your old age."

"Mother, you 're unreasonable," argued Billy. "We can't spoil our lives for the vague hope that we 'll inherit Uncle James's money some day."

"Why is it a vague hope?" demanded Euphemia hotly. "I 'm James's only sister, the only near relative he 's got in the world. Who on earth would he leave his money to if not to me? He 's not the kind that takes any interest in charity, thank Heaven. Why, Billy, you don't understand." She was too earnest to cry now. "Uncle James has two hundred thousand dollars at the very least. I know, because it comes out in the income tax returns every year that one man in Stormville has fifteen thousand a year, and who would it be but James? Think what that would mean to our old age, your father's and mine. Do you suppose I 've enjoyed being buried alive in Stormville all my life? Don't you think I 'd like to go around and have some good clothes occasionally, like other women? Why, Billy, I 've yearned all my

life to go to Paris and London and Rome and all those places. I 've yearned for a little fun and a little life. And here James is old, fifteen years older than I am, and he may die at any moment and make all my dreams come true. Of course I 'm not wishing him to die"—she thought she was sincere in that—"but he 's got to die some day, and when that day comes his money might as well come to me as to"—viciously—*"Bessie!"*

"But, Mother, there 's so much else in life," pleaded Billy.

"Maybe for you," returned his mother, "but what is there for me? What else have I to look forward to in my old age? All my life I 've longed for the day when I 'd not have to skimp any more, when I 'd have the money I 'm entitled to. I was n't born to poverty, Billy, and I was n't made for it. I ought to be living in New York and sending you children to college. Why, when Martha was a baby I picked out the boarding-school I was going to send her to when she grew up. I thought we 'd be rich then, as we have a right to be. And I thought Martha would

be sitting in an opera box and maybe getting engaged to an English lord—and now—" she broke down—"she wants to—to marry an ordinary workman—"

"Mother," said Billy unsteadily, "maybe I could save up enough to—to send you to Europe next summer."

"Oh, could you, Billy?" gasped Euphemia. "Do you really think you could? Of course I would n't use the money on a trip to Europe, but I 've always thought that if we could give James *one* nice present—say, a solid silver tea-service—he *could n't* decently cut us out of his will. Billy, do you think you could do it? I would n't take your money if it was n't for your own good."

"It 's a cracked cylinder," murmured Billy, "a cracked cylinder. You can't do anything with a cracked cylinder. No use trying to patch it up." He left the room and went out to the barn. "Persis," he whispered, "do you think Uncle James stands any chance of getting that tea-set?"

Again next day he took Persis to Pine Island. They had planned it for a week

during the brief moments when they had been together. It was to be an evening picnic, and they were coming back by moonlight.

David Hamilton had been called to the New York office for several days. He was too busy with business problems to give any great attention to the problem of Persis. Moreover, he trusted her perfectly, and had no fear of leaving her alone at the inn, which was filled for the most part with ladies from Boston who knitted and rocked from morning till night.

So, with no one to say them nay, Billy and Persis set out at five o'clock with a lunch-basket, a book, a flash-light, a little bottle of salad-dressing, and a big bottle of milk for cocoa. As they walked across the island Persis acted like a puppy being taken for a walk. She was in the loveliest spot in the world on the loveliest evening in the world with—Billy. She was not in the least oppressed by the feeling that she was being decidedly unconventional in going for an evening picnic on a remote island with a very new acquaintance. Indeed, it is just possible

that she enjoyed the sensation of being dashing.

Billy, in one of his silent moods, but with smiling eyes, unlocked the cabin door. Persis took off her hat, threw it on the shelf, and began preparing the salad and cold tongue. With due seriousness, Billy made a paste of sugar and cocoa, added the milk, and set the sauce-pan on the fire. Persis was inspired to make toast, and sat on the hearth beside Billy. Billy found he would have to stay there to hold the handle of the sauce-pan. Persis held the bread out toward the flame and looked at it every three seconds. The air began to smell lusciously of toast and cocoa. Billy rose and got the butter and a knife, so that Persis could butter each slice while it was hot. Persis noticed that the sauce-pan stayed in place when Billy was not there, but she did not mention it. Billy began holding it again, with the utmost caution, when he got back. The toast and cocoa were finished simultaneously and placed on the table. Billy decided that they had better both sit at the same side of the table, so that

they could both see the fire. Persis admitted that it was a reasonable suggestion.

It was a marvelous supper, down to the very last spoonful of the guava jelly that Persis had brought for dessert. "There is something indescribably sublime," said Persis, pausing before the last tempting morsel, "about guava jelly on hot buttered toast."

Persis removed the traces of butter from her fingers and lips, crumpled up her paper napkin, and threw it in the fire.

"Now we 'll wash the dishes," she said, "and sit down on the hearth with clear consciences." There being only two dishes to wash, besides the cups and saucers and saucepan, the serious business of life was soon over with.

"How about blowing out the lamp?" suggested Billy. "The firelight and moonlight suffer from competition." Persis had just been hoping he would suggest it.

They sat before the fire speechless. The light quivered on Persis' beautiful, serious face. What was she thinking about? If only he could know! Billy wanted to ask so much,

but he could not say a word. She was a marvelous mystery, deliciously human, yet not altogether real, either. He wanted to touch her light hair, glowing in the firelight, and find out if it were of the substance of sunlight.

Suddenly Billy made up his mind that she could never be his, that a person named Billy who lived in Stormville was too prosaic to be part of the picture of gold and violet before him. But his resolution was but a hand lifted to stay the tide. Before he knew it he found himself speaking. He had said, "Persis—I—" and stopped, startled at the sound of his voice. She smiled up at him and looked back into the fire. Something clutched at Billy's throat. He was afraid to speak again, afraid he could not steady his voice. They sat in silence for a long moment. Suddenly Persis put her hand on his knee. His fingers closed over it, enveloped it. He held it tight as though he would never let go. It gave him courage to feel that she was real. "Persis," he whispered, "there never has been and there never will be any one in my life but you."

She was close to him, his arms were around

her, her face was pressed against his shoulder. Gently he pushed back her hair and kissed her. Her kiss was not merely yielded to him; it was given with the same intensity as his. He had not won her; she had come to him just as he had come to her, freely, eagerly.

"Billy," she whispered, "we 've found each other."

It was a moment before she asked the inevitable question, unaware that it was as much a part of the engagement ceremony as the "I will" is of the wedding ceremony. "When," she asked, "did you first—"

"The day we were here before," he told her instantly, "when I suddenly saw you sitting at the table with the sun behind you. . . . I—just—could n't speak. I think I 'd begun to love you before that, but it had n't come rushing over me so that I knew that nothing else in life mattered. Did you—care—then, too?"

"Yes," she whispered. "It 's a queer thing—there 's just one little gesture of yours—the way you move your eyes without moving your head when you 're thinking—that makes me stop breathing. You look as if you were

communing with yourself, and as if I could n't get to you, and that's the time when I want you more than life itself. You don't *mean* to shut me out, do you, Billy?"

Billy asked her if a man in a dungeon would want to shut out the sun. They cleared up all the fragments of misunderstandings that had kept them apart.

"I thought perhaps you did n't want me to—"

"Why, that was exactly what I wanted, but I was afraid perhaps you did n't feel—"

With each step forward there had been the half-frightened shrinking back, the fear of trespassing.

"But now," said Billy confidently, "there will never be any misunderstandings between us."

Her fingers closed quickly on his. "There *must n't* be," she whispered. After a minute she said a little wistfully, "I don't know what Father will say about this."

He was obliged to yield her father a place in his consciousness. "Would n't he want us to marry?" he asked.

She suppressed a smile. No, she was afraid he would n't. Perhaps they ought to wait two years—well, one year, anyway. She was only seventeen. Billy admitted that he would not be able to take care of her for another year. She objected to the expression. She was going to take care of herself, not be a burden to Billy. That was why she was eager to go to college and learn something.

Billy protested that he wanted to take care of her, but she silenced him. "You know how you feel about Uncle James," she said. "You want to stand on your own feet and not be a hanger-on. You think your sister and brother ought to support themselves, and you must admit that I ought to, too. I 've a horror of being dependent, even on you. We 'll have to wait, before we get married, until I can take care of myself, not until you can take care of me."

"But we must n't wait too long," objected Billy.

"If I had to choose," she said solemnly, "between my principles and you—I 'd choose you. All the same, there 's no reason why a

healthy and reasonably intelligent person like me should n't be getting a fair salary, and I intend to have one when I marry, and not absorb all your income."

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "I 'm getting on rather well. People don't seem to know it, but I 'm saving up quite a lot. I have two thousand dollars invested in one company, and a thousand in another, and a few hundreds in the bank. Of course it is n't such a lot, but I seem to make more and more every year. I think in time when I have enough capital I 'll start some kind of a plant."

In a vague way they planned their home together. It was to have a breakfast-porch facing the sea, and a quaint old knocker on the door, and windows shaped so that they would frame the views. And, of course, fireplaces and window-seats and a garden. They would always keep the cabin on Pine Island, so that they could come back and live that evening over again. There would be so many wonderful things to do together.

"And just because we 're both so young,"

added Persis, "we 'll have all those extra years together that so many people miss. Suppose we had n't met each other till we were thirty!" Like all true lovers, she took it for granted that she would have remained single until Billy came along. Billy was not just one of many that she might have loved; he was the one person in all time and space that belonged to her. Undoubtedly they had been tadpoles together. But there came upon her a sudden fear. Suppose something should separate them! Perhaps her father—but no, he *could n't* be so cruel. She would surely be able to make him see what was so plain to her. Nevertheless, she could not shake off the idea. "Billy," she said, clutching his hand as though to keep from being torn from him, "I want to say something silly."

"Say it, dearest," he smiled. The word made him dizzy. He had to stop and kiss her again before he would let her speak.

"Suppose," she said, "something should separate us. Yes, I know it can't, Billy, but still it has happened to other people before, and especially—to people as young as we are.

Billy, let 's make a promise to come together again at a certain time and place. Let 's swear we 'll be there even if we 've been taken away from each other, or grown apart. Even if we 're—I know it could n't happen, Billy, but I want to make it strong—even if we 're both married to other people."

"Don't," he whispered.

"Oh, I know we could n't be, dear," she declared, "but I want to make *sure* that we 'll be together again in the future—even if misunderstandings should come between us, or I should have failed in being independent and be too proud to let you support me; I don't think I could be as silly as that, but you do change so every year it 's hard to say what you 'll be like five years from now. Let 's make it five years from my next birthday—October eleventh." It was the day after his own birthday.

"October eleventh, five years from now," he said solemnly, looking into the fire. What would he have accomplished by then?

"And we 'll meet—let 's see—at the Walpole Hotel in New York, down near Wash-

ington Square. It 's a nice quiet place full of corners where you can sit and talk. We used to stay there before we had a New York apartment. You must reserve the last table on the right by the far window. You understand? The last window in the dining-room. Be sure you 're not late," she ended severely. "There 's no excuse for it when you 've made the appointment five years ahead!"

He repeated her instructions seriously. "I 'll be there," he said. "We 'll go together, for your birthday celebration." He pictured it all to himself. "You 'll be sitting opposite me in a dress the color of lilacs, like the one you 're wearing now; you 'll look a little older but just as beautiful. You 'll be wearing a wedding-ring, and a chain around your neck with one of those purple stones hung on it—"

"An amethyst," said Persis breathlessly.

"It 'll have pearls all around it, and I 'll have just given it to you for your birthday—"

"Thank you, Billy," said Persis gratefully. "You 'll be wearing a necktie that I bought you to celebrate the occasion, and you 'll look just as strange and dark and wonderful as you

do now, but you won't be a mystery any more. I 'll know all your opinions on everything, and all your pet stories—"

"What 's that?" cried Billy. "Is that the kind of a wife you 're going to make?"

"But I 'll shift the conversation around so that you can bring them in, and I 'll listen to them panting with excitement, as if I 'd never heard them before," finished Persis.

"Well, you 'd better," advised Billy.

"It will be a *wonderful* party," sighed Persis. "Oh, *by* the way," she sat up suddenly, "I quite forgot to tell you, I 'm giving a party myself Saturday night."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Billy. "I hope I 'm the only guest."

"You will be one—of a hundred,"replied Persis solemnly. "It 's a dance. So many people around here have asked me to dances and dinners and things that Daddy thought it was time I gave something. Just think, I 'll dance with you for the first time, Billy."

It was as though she had suddenly been removed from his world. With a shock he remembered that she was a city person, in-

timate with the people who lived in the big houses on the shore and sent prices skying during the summer.

"Oh, but Persis," he stammered, "I don't dance, and I have n't any evening-clothes."

"But you won't need to wear evening-clothes," explained Persis confidently. "Just white trousers and a blue coat." She took it for granted that he had white trousers and a blue coat. He was suddenly miserable, realizing that she did not know what a simple person he was. He sat up, bent upon clearing away her misconception of him. "You know, Persis," he said, "I 'm not used to anything of this sort. Maybe you don't realize that I 'm just a workman. I 'm not saying I 'm not as good as the average summer boy you know in some ways, but I don't know how to behave in a parlor. I 'd step on the ladies' trains and knock over the lemonade pitcher."

"There won't be any trains," explained Persis, "and the lemonade will be in a bowl that you won't be able to knock over, unless you do it deliberately, to create a sensation.

And I want to tell you, Billy Clintock, that you 're naturally reposeful and graceful, and if you don't worry about it you 'll be ten times more stunning than any man there."

He could not help feeling a little pleased at that. He had no idea that he was ornamental. He determined to get some white trousers and a blue coat. Yes, if Persis asked it he would walk on his knees to Washington, swim the Hellespont, even—in the vastness of his love he swore it—even wear a monacle and spats.

## CHAPTER VII

### UNCLE JAMES REARRANGES MATTERS

JIMMY came home earlier than usual and threw his hat on the floor. "Well, it 's all up," he said, flinging himself on the sofa.

Euphemia turned pale. "James has n't—" she asked.

"Yes, he has. Fired me. You can thank Billy for it."

Euphemia went to the back door and called toward the barn: "Billy! Come here this minute!"

Unhappily Billy was caught in the act of inspecting himself before the glass to see if he looked too much of a darn fool in the white trousers and blue coat. The urgency of his mother's voice made him come as he was to the house. The sight of him in his careless splendor enraged Jimmy. Always secretly

envious of his brother's strength and good looks, Jimmy had soothed his vanity with the reflection that Billy was without social graces and would never be welcome at the best parties of Stormville. Jimmy turned white. "Well," he said, "you 'll be glad to hear that you 've ditched me."

"It 's your doing, Billy," cried his mother, coming toward him with outstretched finger. "You 're the one that started it all." She was trembling with anger. "When you were a little boy you insulted James here in this very house, or out in the barn, anyway, and you put Martha up to this nonsense, and you 've wrecked Jimmy's career and spoiled my chances. You know you have!"

"And you stand there like a great bumpkin," yelled Jimmy, infuriated by Billy's tremendous appearance, "and gloat over me because you 've spoiled my life. *You* never had any chance with Uncle James, so you want to ruin my chances and Martha's. *I* know what you 're trying to do." Jimmy was suddenly inspired. "You 're going to let Bessie's brats get the money and then marry one of them!"

All at once Jimmy had, he believed, pieced two and two together. Henrietta and Wilhelmina had recently taken a spurt of interest in Billy, because of his intimacy with Persis, and had invited him over to play bridge. True, he had declined, but that was doubtless only to lead them on.

Struck by this, the first logical explanation of Billy's conduct that she had ever been able to conceive, Euphemia pounced upon it with fury. "So that 's what you 're doing!" she cried. "So that 's it! And I never even saw it. Jimmy, you 're pretty smart." Her admiration of Jimmy gave way instantly to resentment against Billy. "To think that my own son would do a thing like that! Marry one of *Bessie's* girls! For money!"

"Where 's Martha?" asked Billy wearily.

"Getting married somewhere," growled Jimmy. "She left a note on Uncle James's desk, and Uncle James came in swearing bloody murder and fired me."

Euphemia sank into a chair. Then it was all over with Martha. There was no hope. Her daughter had gone down for the third

time. In the reaction from her rage she felt too weak to say anything more to Billy. Billy went back to the barn. What was the use of trying to tell them anything?

Billy stayed in the barn until it was time to go to the dance. He did not feel like any supper. He took a bath under the shower that he had rigged up in one corner of the ground floor of the barn and went up-stairs to get into his new clothes. His new silk socks felt cold upon his feet, but rather pleasant. How smoothly the patent-leather pumps, bought from a mail-order house, slipped over them! His feet felt small and easy to manage, perhaps he would be able to dance after all.

Billy felt in his lower bureau drawer for his one white shirt. "What in thunder?" he muttered, as his groping hand touched something strange. He pulled the drawer farther open and struck a match. The yellow eyes of Nelly, the cat blinked up at him. Something was wriggling around her. Kittens! Billy held the match closer. Yes, there were two brand-new kittens. The drawer had been left partly open, and Nelly had moved in! The

match went out, and Billy dropped on the bed. "For the love of Heaven," he remarked.

Well, it was no use trying to get the white shirt. The kittens were on top of it, and Billy decided that they were too young to be moved. So he got out a pink striped shirt and the striped collar that matched it. Billy did not think it looked very well, but clothes were a minor matter, and no real person would think the less of him for not wearing a white shirt.

As he left the barn in the dusk his mother called to him, "Billy, where are you going?"

"To a dance," he answered tersely.

"Of all things! Where?"

"At the Inn."

"Who 's giving it?"

"People named Hamilton."

Jimmy had followed his mother to the door to hear what was up. Billy going to the Hamiltons' dance! Jimmy nearly dropped. "Don't be a fool," he growled. "You 'll only make a goat of yourself. You know you can't dance. And you look like the devil."

Billy walked on without answering. As he came out of the darkness into the light of the

Inn and heard music and laughter inside, Billy understood for the first time why people liked parties. He stood for a moment on the piazza, looking in with intent eyes. Yes, there she was. In a wonderful frock of white lace. How she stood out from all the rest! And she was his! This amazing person was his.

Billy stepped inside. Instantly Persis saw him and ran to him, both hands out. "Billy," she cried, "you 've got to dance with me!"

"But I can't, Persis," he protested.

"Come out in the hall and I 'll show you how," she insisted.

He got along better than he had expected. Why, some of it was nothing but walking. The fox-trot you could make up as you went along. He could get away with it, he decided.

She introduced him to a lot of people. She was careful to introduce him to the right ones —those who were either too humble or too exalted to mind his shirt. To Billy they were all folks. He was happily free from the class

consciousness that makes the average man instantly catalogue a stranger as a workman or a capitalist, a plumber, school-teacher, porter, or potentate. He did not see any difference between the nice little telephone-girl at the Inn, whom Persis had been careful to invite to the party, and the daughter of a Boston banker whose ancestors figured in every school history of American literature. Both of them were nice to him, and both were human, intelligent girls. Indeed, he put them in the same category! The card-index of Billy's mind was arranged neither in geographical, alphabetical, nor social order. The grouping was strictly in accordance with fundamental values, with Persis at the top in a compartment all to herself, and Uncle James in equal solitude at the bottom.

Henrietta and Wilhelmina were not quite sure whether to make up to Billy or not. He was certainly good-looking, and evidently in strong with Persis, but his shirt was awful. They reluctantly decided that their social position was not quite strong enough to

counterbalance the shirt, that, indeed, the shirt would endanger their social position if it came near them. True, Billy was dancing with the banker's daughter from Boston, but that might easily be interpreted as an act of agreeable condescension on her part. Obviously she was beyond any shadow the shirt might cast. A king may look at a cat without menace to his social position. But should Henrietta and Wilhelmina dance with Billy it might be recalled that they were his cousins, part and parcel of the shirt by a family tie. No, it could n't be done.

Mr. Hamilton was not particularly nice to Billy, but Billy decided that he was just naturally a stiff sort of man. Persis was enough, anyway, to drive all other interests from Billy's mind. She was always coming to him whenever she had two seconds to spare. She even managed to snatch five minutes out on the dock with him, where the sound of the music merged with the sound of the waves, and the light from the Inn and the light from the moon melted together on the water. It was the same moon that had flooded them

on the island, only now it had risen a little later, just because they were staying up later.

The hostess's interest in Billy did not pass unnoticed, and among those who remarked it was Randolph. While Persis and Billy were out on the pier, Randolph went to a dark corner of the piazza and thought. He had decided long since that he was going to marry Persis, and he did not like the thought that Billy might develop the same idea. Of course Billy lacked sophistication, but he had looks, and girls were romantic. One must not discount a rival's chances.

Randolph's brain was not unlike his mother's. His course was always roundabout. When he wanted to call attention to the mote in his neighbor's eye, he remarked on the colour of its iris.

Ah! Here came Uncle James, heavily pompous, with an eye on the girls in their evening-dresses. Randolph sauntered over to him. They sat down together.

"Quite a gay little party," said Randolph in his best man-of-the-world manner. "Every-

body in Stormville's here—even Billy Clintock."

Uncle James's eyes narrowed. "Where," he asked, "is Billy Clintock?"

"Oh, out on the pier with Persis, I believe," answered Randolph indifferently. "He seems to be hanging around her all the time. But Persis—you know how she is. She 'll suffer anything rather than hurt the merest—puppy." Randolph felt, as an artist, that he had uttered the last word with just a little too much feeling. But, Lord! Uncle James was too stupid to notice fine shades like that.

"How did that puppy get in here?" demanded Uncle James. Randolph perceived that his stressing of the word had been precisely right. "Oh, he 's been seeing quite a lot of Persis, I understand," he answered. "Too bad her father does n't do anything about it. Of course Billy may be a good enough sort of fellow, and those liquid-eyed men always do have a way with women, but for a girl like Persis to throw herself away on—"

"There 's no question of her throwing her-

self away!" exploded Uncle James. Ah! That remark about the liquid eyes had worked. A man of Uncle James's interests would not lightly allow another man of a totally different type to have "a way with women."

"They receive that scapegrace because he 's my nephew," declared Uncle James, "and it 's my duty to put them straight. I count on you, Randolph, to indorse what I say. I take it you 've got no love for Billy Clintock?"

"I admit," said Randolph cautiously, "that he has never appealed to me."

"Being my nephew, he would n't," remarked Uncle James, but he instantly changed the subject. Randolph was his ally, and must not be piqued.

"Snappy little filly, that girl in green," murmured Uncle James. "Get 'em young, Randolph; that 's my advice as man to man. Get 'em young, and train 'em the way you like 'em. I never got married myself, could n't settle down to one woman; but my advice to you, boy, is to get married and have a good woman to look after you in your old age, a good fine-looking woman, like this Persis.

Maybe you 'd be smart enough to have your cake and eat it, too. I never was—"

"No," thought Randolph scornfully, "you 'd have bragged to your wife about your other affairs."

"No," continued Uncle James, "I could n't have got away with it." He had started out with the clever idea of making Randolph jealous of Billy, but he was eternally interested in the reminiscences of his clandestine love-making, and he could not resist giving Randolph a picture of what a dashing fellow he had been. "Now, there was my first little darling," he sighed, "little Milly What 's-her-name. I was n't more than eighteen then. I was so wild over that girl that I was almost ready to marry her. But I kept my head; I kept my head. And then there was a little sweetheart I got hold of over at the county fair. She was in a side-show posing as a real live mermaid. And I just went up to her and winked and said, 'Now, you little humbug, I 'm coming back at six to take you out to supper, and we 'll find out if you 've got any—' "

The music stopped, and Uncle James left his sentence in the air. Randolph changed the subject. His uncle's unfastidiousness disgusted him. There were ways and ways of doing these things. He had always looked forward, himself, to a few months with some slant-eyed, strange, exotic woman in some sophisticated spot, possibly the Riviera, but when it came to freaks at a county fair, Randolph was thoroughly annoyed. Besides, he wanted to get Uncle James back to the subject of Billy. Opportunely Billy entered, following Persis.

"Billy, c'm 'ere," called Uncle James.

Slowly Billy walked over to his uncle and stood beside him, almost haughtily.

"What have you got to say about Martha's doings?" demanded Uncle James.

"Nothing, except to congratulate her," returned Billy with hauteur.

"Oh, you congratulate her," repeated Uncle James, with narrowed eyes. "Well, I 'm going to fix you, young man, and don't you forget it." Billy turned on his heel.

"Randolph," said Uncle James, "go fetch

David Hamilton. Tell him to c'm' out on the piazza. I 've got something to say to him."

In a few moments Randolph, Uncle James, and Hamilton stood together in the darkness of the piazza. "David," said James, "I 'm afraid you 're being taken in. You 've got my nephew, Billy Clintock, here at your party, and I just wanted to warn you that Billy 's not to be trusted in decent society." Hamilton started. "No, sir," continued James, "I 'm through with him, and he 's out of my will. He 's vicious; that 's what he is. Ain't that so, Randolph?"

Randolph hesitated, but the eyes of his uncle were upon him. "I must admit that I have no use for the boy at all," he hedged.

"What worries me," continued James, "is that he 's hanging around Persis all the time. Now, you know how young girls are. They get an idea in their heads—"

"But Persis is only a child!" cried Hamilton. He said it again, as though by repetition he could make it true. "She 's nothing but a little girl. She has n't the remotest

thought of falling in love." Even the most intelligent parents sometimes talk that way.

Randolph smiled a sad, superior smile. Hamilton caught it. "We 'll have this out right away," he said. "Randolph, go and get Persis and bring her to my sitting-room, and you come too, James."

They gathered again in the private sitting-room, Persis startled, her father expressionless. Uncle James lit a cigar and sat heavily back in his chair. Randolph stood with a chair in front of him, looking down. His long fingers clenched the back of the chair until the knuckles whitened.

"Persis," said David Hamilton stonily, "your Uncle James tells me that this Billy—er—"

"Clintock," prompted James.

"Clintock, who is here at the dance and rather—er—conspicuously attentive to you is a—a disreputable person. Am I right, James?"

"That 's what I 'd call him," said James, twisting the cigar to the corner of his mouth. Still Randolph looked down at his white

hands. Persis turned pale but said nothing.

"Of course this—boy—is nothing to you, Persis." Her father affirmed it, but waited, nevertheless, for an answer.

Persis drew a deep breath. "I had n't meant to tell you for a long while, Daddy," she said, "but Billy and I are engaged." The whole circle stirred. James took out his cigar. Randolph dropped the chair and put his hands behind him. David Hamilton took a step forward.

"You can't mean it, child!" he cried incredulously.

"Yes, I do mean it," said Persis with heat, "and if we 're going to talk about Billy I insist on his being here."

"Go and get him, Randolph," ordered Hamilton, in spite of a protest from James.

Nothing was said in the interval before Billy arrived. James looked indignantly at his cigar and put it savagely back into his mouth. Hamilton walked to the window and stood looking out through the green denim curtains. Persis stood alone, breathing hard, her color rising. The door opened, and Billy

and Randolph entered. Persis went over to Billy at once. "Remember, nothing can change me," she whispered. They stood side by side, Persis flushed and defiant, Billy grim.

"Clintock," said Hamilton suddenly, "I forbid you to see Persis again."

Billy looked at him in amazement. "What 's happened?" he asked.

"Simply that I have found out that you are not a fit companion for my daughter," said Hamilton.

Billy stood looking at him, hardly able to believe that he had heard the words. "What 's the matter with me?" he gasped.

"Oh, Billy, Billy," intoned Uncle James, as one who said, "Why try to pretend?"

"Oh," said Billy, and he understood. He walked over to Hamilton. "I don't know what my uncle 's been saying," he said, "but I can assure you that I *am* fit to be a friend of Persis. Of course I 'm not worthy to—to —black her boots, but, then, neither is anybody in the world." He turned to Persis. "I 've nothing to conceal from you," he said.

"I know it!" cried Persis, "and if there 's any more talk we 'll get married to-morrow."

Distant dance-music filled the tense pause that followed. Hamilton looked at Billy, but with a prejudiced eye. What he saw was not the candor of Billy's gaze, the vigorous molding of his features. Instead his eye was caught and held by Billy's absurd shirt and collar. Hamilton was something of a self-made man who by natural sensitiveness and delicacy of perception had quickly acquired the form and manner of good breeding, but, since he had never intimately chewed on the golden spoon in his infancy, he could never bring himself to fling it in the corner, as Persis did, when occasion required. Billy's shirt and collar stamped him, for Hamilton, as a jockey. Never in his humblest days would Hamilton have worn them. He turned upon Persis icily. *"To-morrow,"* he said, "we are going back to New York. Moreover, you are not to see this man again. Unless you immediately promise me not to see him and not to write to him, I shall send you to a convent in France. Remember, you

are not of age. I am legally as well as morally within my rights in trying to protect you. . . . I am waiting for your promise."

"Very well," flashed Persis, "I 'll give it!" But she whispered to Billy: "And I'll break it the first chance I get. There's no sacredness in that kind of a promise."

Billy was shaken. In Stormville promises were promises. "I—I can't let you do that," he whispered. "I—I don't know what to do."

Hamilton strode up to him. "If you 're any kind of a man," he said, "you won't see Persis again. You 're older than she, and ought to know that it 's a waste of time for her to think of you. I want you to leave without causing any more trouble." Billy turned and left the room. Before he knew what had happened Persis was out in the hall with him and had closed the door behind her. "Billy," she said, "we 'll get married the minute I 'm of age—one year from October eleventh."

Billy could not speak. He took both her hands in a tight grip and with that pressure promised her everlasting loyalty. He turned from her and hurried out of the Inn, dazed

and colorless. But there came a new strength in his face with the swelling of his unshakable certainty that neither Hamilton nor Uncle James, nor even Randolph with all his subtlety, would be able to keep Persis from him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### UNCLE JAMES WAGES THE GREAT PRICE WAR

UNCLE James missed Jimmy at the cannery. It was not easy to find any one so anxious to please or ready to accept such a small salary, and so when for the fourth time he looked around to give Jimmy a curt order and found Jimmy not there a magnanimous desire to forgive Jimmy welled within him. On further reflection, it occurred to him that his forgiveness might just as well be made contingent on something in the nature of a spoke to be inserted into Billy's wheel. His efficient business head was always mindful of such possibilities.

Following upon the heels of these workings of the Uncle James mind came action. The Uncle James hat was planted upon the magnate's head, and off waddled the big man of Stormville. He came, in due course, to

the Clintock front door, rang the bell, and, without troubling to wipe his feet on the mat —for who were the Clintocks to expect such ceremonies?—entered as soon as the door was opened by his frightened sister.

"Now at last the end is come," reflected Euphemia. "My children he has cast off one by one, and he is come to strike me down in my old age, to announce that he has changed his will, omitting all mention of the name of Clintock." Here was the day she had been dreading all her life, and it was Billy who had hastened it.

"Euphemia," said James, routing Nelly, the cat, from the most comfortable chair, and heavily sitting thereon, "I have changed my mind."

Euphemia twisted her apron. "Oh, James, dear," she pleaded, "don't do that!"

"Oh," said James maliciously, "so you don't want me to take Jimmy back?"

Euphemia's countenance was transformed. "Oh, James," she gasped, "if you only would!"

"Where is Jimmy?" asked the magnate.

"He 's—he 's—studying up-stairs," qua-

vered Euphemia. "I 'll get him"; and she ran up to wake Jimmy, who was luxuriating in late hours, the melancholy consolation of the jobless. Uncle James further demanded Billy, and Billy was produced.

Jimmy, after a hasty toilet, stood blinking before Uncle James. Billy towered over him, leaning against the door. How big that boy was getting!

"Now," said Uncle James, "we 'll get down to brass tacks. Here 's my proposition. Jimmy can come back to the business if Billy leaves this house."

Billy made no sign that he had heard. He felt that this was not his affair. If the family wanted to get rid of him, he would go.

"But—but we can't turn Billy out," stammered Euphemia, vaguely feeling that but for her meals Billy would starve.

"Very well," said James, "don't"; and he reached for his hat.

"Oh, wait a moment, James," wailed Euphemia. "Maybe you 'll forgive Billy. He feels so badly about having offended you. Don't you, Billy?"

"No," said Billy, "I don't."

Uncle James not merely reached for his hat; he picked it up. Euphemia, always quick of temper, turned on Billy. "Billy, I 've stood enough from you," she raged, "and I 'm not going to ruin Jimmy's life by standing any more. If you can't be respectful to your Uncle James you can go. I 'm through with you."

Billy looked at his mother but said nothing. If, to gratify Uncle James's whim, she would cast him off, he had no wish to stay with her.

"In that case," said James, taking out his watch, "Jimmy comes back."

Billy's dark eyes moved to Jimmy's face. He roused himself and spoke. "Jimmy," he said, "if you 'll work with me I 'll pay you twice what Uncle James pays you. And you 'll be free—free to go and come as you like and to call Uncle James a beastly blackguard."

"As if he 'd want to!" shrieked Euphemia.

"Choose!" said James.

Jimmy gave his brother a black look. His

heart had been in his mouth when he had heard Billy utter the expression Jimmy was accustomed to apply, in private, to Uncle James. "I choose Uncle James and a respectable life," he said.

"I thought you would," said James. Again he took out his watch. "We 'll go back to the office together." Jimmy had had no breakfast, but he went meekly for his hat and followed Uncle James out of the house.

Euphemia went into the kitchen. Billy stood where he was, thinking. He decided that his family could get along without the money he paid them for board, so long as it usually went to Uncle James, anyway. As for him, it would be cheaper to live away from home. He did not mind leaving particularly, but he wished his mother had not been so ready to choose between him and James. He rather thought that if he had a son he would not turn him away no matter how deeply he was annoyed with him. Well, the Uncle James idea was twisted into the very fiber of Euphemia's being.

Euphemia came back and casually dusted the sitting-room. "You know you can always come home to dinner," she remarked.

"Thank you," said Billy expressionlessly.

Euphemia poked her duster through the scrolls at the top of the sofa. "After all," she argued aloud, "plenty of boys leave home at your age. And it is n't as if you 'd be out of reach of help. If Jimmy gets the money I 'll see that he lets you have an allowance, though you don't deserve it!"

"Please thank Jimmy for me," said Billy.

Euphemia was not unmindful of Billy's irony. "Well, I can tell you it 'll be no joke for Jimmy," she said with heat. "With you and Martha both on his hands, he 'll have a time of it even if he gets *all* of James's money. Jimmy 's been a good boy, and he deserves to have a little pleasure out of his money, after he 's worked so hard. And a lot of thanks he 'll get for giving half of it to you and Martha!"

Billy prepared to leave. "I 'm storing up a reservoir of gratitude," he said, "to let loose on Jimmy on the day when I get the first

instalment of my allowance." He left the room. A second later he came back. "Don't worry about me, Mother," he said, putting his arm around her shoulder. "I 'll get along first rate."

Euphemia burst into tears and clung to him. Billy was the only man of the family that she ever felt like clinging to. "I *could n't* let you spoil Jimmy's chances," she sobbed.

"No, of course not," said Billy hurriedly, patting her shoulder.

"James always *was* a brute," gasped Euphemia.

Billy left the house and went to his room in the barn. He packed his clothes and the few other things he cared to take with him in an old trunk. He went down-stairs and looked around at his lathe and other pieces of machinery. It would be something of a job carting them away.

Billy jumped into one of the cars he had on hand and started off to a place on the shore road that he thought he might be able to get. He had always considered it a good

buy. The house had burned down, but the barn was still standing. Billy looked it over and decided that a tar-paper roof would make it tight, and that a little carpentry work would put it into shape. The barn faced the road, and the land behind it—about an acre—went down to the inlet. It was a good place to keep motor-boats. Billy decided that he could add to his income by storing boats in the winter. He went up-stairs into the harness-room and figured that it could be made into a first-rate home. He was used to living in a barn. He would bring his stove over, set it up down-stairs, and let it heat the whole place. There was a nice view from the harness-room, a view of land and sea. He 'd enjoy that. He had never lived with a view before. Billy began to feel quite at home. Well, he 'd better find out if he could get it before he did any more planning. Perhaps the owner, Mrs. Ward, would not hear of selling it.

Billy went back to the village and rang the bell of Mrs. Ward's well groomed little

house. Mrs. Ward allowed him to enter with the tentative manner of one who reserved the right to turn him out at any moment.

"Mrs. Ward," said Billy, sweeping off his hat, "I 'd like to know if you 'd consider selling that barn of yours over on the inlet."

Mrs. Ward hesitated, and then, as was her habit, said what was on her mind. "I would n't sell except for cash." Evidently she thought that closed the subject.

"How much are you asking for it, Mrs. Ward?" asked Billy.

"Well," answered Mrs. Ward, "I guess I 'd let it go at five hundred dollars, though it 's worth more."

"There 's an acre of land, I take it," said Billy.

"About that," agreed Mrs. Ward.

"And it is n't mortgaged?"

"No, there 's not a cent of mortgage on it. Don't suppose I could have got it mortgaged if I 'd tried."

"I 'll take it," said Billy.

Mrs. Ward was nonplussed. That Clintock

boy could not afford to pay five hundred dollars for a barn. "What 's the matter with your own barn?" she asked.

"I 'm leaving home," said Billy briefly.

Mrs. Ward received the news in silence. She knew Euphemia Clintock well and guessed she was the reason Billy was leaving home. That Jimmy did not amount to much, either. She began to take a little interest in Billy. Nevertheless, she must not let friendship interfere with business. "You expect to pay cash?" she asked.

"I 'll write you a check now," said Billy. He happened to have a particularly good balance at the bank just then.

"Well," said Mrs. Ward, "you 're one of those that is n't long about making up their minds. But if you 're sure you want the barn I s'pose it is n't for me to argue about it. It 's a good solid barn, even if it is old. Come to think of it, your own grandfather—no, he was your great-grandfather—Silas Clintock built it, and what old Silas built he built to stay."

"I *knew* that barn was well built," said Billy proudly, "and it 's got good timber in

it. Suppose we go right down to the town hall now and have Mr. Woodhall make out the papers?"

Half an hour later the barn was Billy's. An hour after that, Billy's trunk and some of his machinery had been moved in. A month later the roof of the barn had been covered with tar-paper and the machinery was going full force. Moreover, there was a good load of wood in the feed-room, and several shelves full of books in Billy's bedroom. Billy was prepared for the winter.

At first Billy was a little lonely, but after a while he began to enjoy his solitude. He developed a passion for reading, went through most of the books in the Stormville library, and bought others that he saw advertised. One seemed to lead to another, an endless chain. Billy swallowed everything—history, chemistry, fiction, mechanics, art, and travel. Sometimes he would hold three books in his lap while he read a fourth, he was so anxious to read them all at once. The books that Persis had chanced to mention to him he kept separately on a shelf. Persis was still the

center of his existence, though he never heard from her. He knew that she was in college, and he subscribed to the local paper of the college town in the hope of seeing some news of her, but he was determined not to write to her but to do his part to keep the promise she had made to her father.

Most of his days Billy gave to his work, which was steadily branching out. He was beginning to get something of a reputation around Stormville. He was willing to buy almost anything that anybody wanted to sell, and he could usually supply people with anything they wanted to buy. Moreover, people soon found out that Billy's things were just what he declared them to be.

Billy traveled thirty or forty miles to buy cars and motor-boats. He went to all the auctions, with especial attention to those held in the winter-time when the city people were happily absent. His biggest bargain was a car that had been in a fire and had fallen from the second story of a barn, to be left out on the snow all winter. Old Moses Beacon nearly laughed his head off when it was

knocked down to Billy for fifteen dollars. "I expect that kid thinks he 's going to make a Rolls-Royce out of that heap of tin cans," he chuckled. Even Billy did not think much of the wreck. He had merely hoped to get some spare parts out of it. But when he towed it to his barn and looked it over he found that a little coaxing made the engine run. True, the machine needed a new battery, new wheels, seat-covers, and top; but after these had been supplied and a coat of paint added Billy found that he had a first-rate car for sale. He sold it in April for two hundred and fifty dollars.

By spring Billy's business was getting so large that he hired a man to help him. He figured that he would be able to afford to marry and build a house by the following autumn; in fact, his favorite occupation of an evening was to design houses featuring breakfast-porches facing the sea. His hopes were high, his resources mounting—and then came trouble.

Billy had seen a good deal of Martha and Paul, and had had more than a finger in

starting the new business. Paul was a straightforward young Canadian, with an enormous capacity for work. He had started his cannery on comparatively little capital, but had cut down expenses to the bone. The can-labels, for instance, were printed in one color only—black. But the design was effective, nevertheless: silhouettes of lobsters, crabs, and fishes on orange paper. Paul felt that his labels were far better-looking than the elaborate three-color labels of the Peters cannery, representing a wooden family in costumes of 1895 gathered, with knives and forks upright, around a sea-food dinner.

Billy, Paul, and Martha had gone over every process in the new plant, which was established about two miles out of Stormville, and had cut down every item of waste in material or routine that they could discover. And then, just as the cannery turned out its first batch of canned codfish, came the great price war.

The war began when the Peters cannery made a drastic cut in prices with the obvious intention of making trouble for the Street

cannery. Within a week other big canneries along the coast reduced prices. Before a month had passed the price of canned fish had come down all over the East, and Martha's marriage to Paul was influencing breakfast-tables as far west as the Mississippi.

Simultaneously came a price war in buying. The fishermen rejoiced. James Peters was giving them enormous prices. Here, however, Paul had prepared his line of defense. He had made a six months' contract with certain fishermen, who were supplying him with all the sea-food he could can. Billy's favorite recreation those days, when he could spare the time for recreation, was fishing. He sold his fish to his uncle's agent.

Paul, Billy, and Martha held frequent consultations. Paul calculated that if he sold at the prevailing prices his capital would be gone by August. Thereupon Billy gave him the drastic advice not to sell at all. "I 'll put two thousand dollars into the business," he said, "and take stock for it, and you store your stuff until prices go up. They 'll have to

sooner or later." So Paul kept on producing and storing. By July he was out of money again and was forced to sell some of his canned goods. But every can that went that way meant so much wasted capital. Billy could not stand it. "I 'll squeeze up another two thousand," he said. "This can't keep up forever."

Billy sold out virtually all his investments. He had only eight hundred dollars left. And still the price war raged. By the beginning of September Paul was again at the end of his resources, and with a new responsibility on his hands: there was a baby coming. "I 'm about at the end, Billy," he said one day. He looked ten years older than he had a year before. "I guess he 's forced me to the wall. I can't keep on canning, but I 've still got to buy fish. My contracts won't be up for two months more. All I can do is to get what I can for the plant and stock; and it won't be much with prices the way they are."

"Paul," said Billy, "don't you give up till

the last gasp. The other people are probably just as much up against it as we are. I bet prices will go up again before the month 's out."

"Yes, but suppose they don't," argued Paul. "I don't want to be a quitter, but sometimes it 's better to quit than to keep on throwing good money after bad. Maybe the best thing for me to do is to save what I can from the wreck while there 's something left to save. I must have *a little* on hand when the baby 's born."

Billy was silent. After a pause he said almost to himself, "I can't *bear* to have all that work and thought and money wasted."

Paul shrugged and turned away. "Lord knows I 'm not pleased at the thought," he said, "I slaved ten years for the capital that that plant was started on."

Billy began to calculate his resources. "There 's a little juice in the old orange yet," he decided. "I can let you have eight hundred dollars."

It was all he had left, and Paul knew it.

"I can't take it, Billy," he said. "You 'll be stranded if I do. I 'm not going to let you bankrupt yourself out of charity."

"There 's no charity about it," said Billy indignantly. "Do you think I 'd put a cent in the cannery if I did n't believe in it? It 's a good little plant, and it 's efficiently run, and I can't stand seeing it go to pieces. I tell you, Paul, if you keep on going and hold on to your stock you 'll be in clover in another month."

The eight hundred dollars went into the plant, and the wheels kept on turning. October drew near, and there were no signs of price recovery. The trade papers printed editorials on the situation, showing by careful figures that canned sea-food could not be sold at such prices with any profit.

October 11 was to have been his wedding-day. The date had been before Billy's eyes all the year. A week before it came he wrote to Persis at the college. It was only a short note; Billy felt too badly to be able to put his feelings into words. So he simply told her that he could not afford to marry for an-

other year at least—a stiff little sentence or two.

Billy mailed his letter and went out to the simple house Paul and Martha had leased near the cannery. Martha was sewing in the living-room, visiting with a friend who had dropped in, and so Paul and Billy went into one of the bedrooms to talk. They had kept the worst of the situation from Martha, but now that the crash was coming she would have to know it.

"Well, we 've done the best we could," said Paul, ready to face disaster, since there seemed to be no way to avoid it.

"And just those little green dangles over the ears," came the voice of the visitor in the next room.

"I suppose I can get a job in a factory somewhere," Paul went on.

"Come and work with me, Paul," urged Billy. "I got you into this. I did n't have sense enough to see that you can't put over everything by main force. But I swear I 'll make it up to you. I 'll live on bread and cheese till I do."

"And they run as bad as any other kind," complained the visitor. "And I say it 's no use paying more for them when they don't wear no better; that 's what I say."

"Lord, man, I 'm the one to make it up to you," objected Paul. "Don't think I 'll take anything more from you. You ought to be saving up to get married some day."

"Not a while yet," said Billy with tightened lips.

"Got somebody picked out?" asked Paul, feeling his way. Billy was not one to share his most intimate thoughts, and Paul had a certain curiosity about what was going on inside his brother-in-law's head.

"Yes," admitted Billy, "but I wrote her today that we 'd have to put it off another year."

"Anybody I know?" prodded Paul.

"No," said Billy. "Now about that welding-machine. You could sell that to—"

"Oh, he just works us to death," complained the visitor, "and it 's been worse than ever since you left. James Peters is the meanest man alive." Billy and Paul stopped talking, both suddenly remembering that the girl in

the next room worked in the office of the Peters cannery.

"Last night he kept us till *half-past seven* writing letters about the price changes. And it is n't as if we got good pay. Why, I 'm only getting—"

"Then, you 're going to change prices," interrupted Martha, trying to keep her voice steady. "I suppose there 's going to be an increase?"

"Oh, I forget. I never pay much attention to what I write when it 's only a business letter," answered the visitor. "Yes, I think it was an increase. Or a decrease. Say, Martha, did I tell you about the jersey dress my mother just made me? It 's to wear at the office, you know, and it 's real swell. Where 's a piece of paper? I 'll show you just how she fixed it."

"I 'd like to hear about the price changes," prompted Martha.

"Say, honestly," marveled her friend, "if that is n't just like you. Here you 're out of the old business and lucky enough to be married, and still you go harping on it. I 'll

say if I was married and any one said canned fish to me, he 'd get some thrown at him."

"Well, it *was* an increase, was n't it?" begged Martha.

"I guess so," replied the visitor absently. "If it makes you happy I 'll say so, anyway. The letter began, 'In view of the extraordinary something-or-other.' And I swear I left out the 'a' in extraordinary every other time. That 's me all over. Once I get a thing in my head wrong you could chop it off without getting it out. My mother says she 's like to die every time I say 'gabardine,' when I mean 'brilliantine.' Now, just let me show you how she fixed that dress. I look real cute in it, if I do say so myself. Here—I 've got some paper in my bag. I always stuff in the letters I spoil, or old lynx-eye would see 'em torn up and raise the roof. She just cut it with kimono sleeves, like that, and then she gathered up that extra fullness on the hips into a kind of ball, and put a button in the middle so it looks sort of like a flower, and then put the belt down here—"

Billy and Paul looked into each other's

eyes. "If he increases, the rest will follow," said Paul in a low voice. "They 're all ready to jump the minute the first one starts going up."

"We 'll hang on another week," whispered Billy.

"Say, I can't sit around all day." The visitor seemed to be rising. "My mother she says I never come home when I 've got any other place at all to go to, and I guess she 's right. She said to me this morning, 'Now, don't you go anywheres on your way home to-night,' and here I am. What time does that trolley go by? O Lord, I 've got to run. Where 's my hat, anyway? Good-by Martha. Excuse this haste. Seems to me I 'm always in a hurry. If I miss that trolley my mother 'll kill me." There were sounds of hurried departure, and a second later the flash of a bright-green sweater at the window as the visitor sped past on her life-and-death race with the trolley.

Billy and Paul went into the sitting-room. "Did you hear?" cried Martha. "It looks like an increase!"

Billy picked up the sketch of the visitor's new dress. "Don't tell me she 's going to wear that!" he protested. "Well, she may be a dressmaker, but she 's no draftsman." He turned the paper over. "Listen to this!" he cried. "Form letter from the Peters cannery." He read it hastily to himself. "The Lord be praised," he exulted. "Paul, you 're reprieved. Come down from the gallows a free man. The Peters cannery is putting prices way up because of 'extrordinary' increases—spelled without the 'a,' bless her heart."

## CHAPTER IX

### RANDOLPH EXPLAINS

"FEELING toward Billy as you do—" Randolph paused as though the words had been hard to speak before he finished hurriedly: "I can understand why you expected me to defend him. Perhaps I should have."

"Of course you should have," returned Persis, but she added a moment later, "if you knew that the things Uncle James said were not true."

"Exactly," agreed Randolph.

Persis did not fail to understand, but she had no intention of making Randolph's explanations easy. She had not yet forgiven Randolph. It was near the end of her freshman year at college, and so far she had had no conversation with him beyond passing greetings. For a moment she wondered how she

had come to accept this invitation to take tea with him at the Wayside Inn. Then she remembered the argument that had persuaded her. It was not just, Randolph had said, to end their friendship without hearing his explanations. So she had agreed to hear what he had to say. In all her dealings Persis was strictly just.

The tea arrived, attended by buttery toasted muffins under cover. A tea-pot, gay with birds that would have brought tears to the eyes of a milliner, was set before Persis. She poured the tea silently. She saw that Randolph wanted her to speak, but she determined not to. She would not be the first to suggest that what had been said about Billy might be true.

"If the accusations had not been true," Randolph, said at last, "and I had known it, my silence would have been inexcusable."

"Lemon?" asked Persis.

"And one lump," inclined Randolph.

Randolph uncovered the muffins and passed them. Persis began to eat without speaking. She refused to make his task easy.

"For your sake I am willing to believe that they were not true," said Randolph suddenly.

"Tell me exactly what you mean," ordered Persis.

He thought a moment, then spoke deliberately. "When I go over in my mind all I know of Billy Clintock I realize that I cannot positively say that there is anything against him. Therefore I should have defended him. You were right."

"But at the time you thought Uncle James was right when he called Billy disreputable?" asked Persis crisply.

"The Clintock name has not the best reputation at the cannery," returned Randolph guardedly. "There are, naturally, many girls there of unsavory reputation. I 've heard in an offhand way that one of those Clintock boys runs around with them. But I cannot truthfully say that I have heard anything definite against Billy." Randolph spoke sincerely, and he was sincere. He had taken it for granted that Billy was like Jimmy, but he felt that there was a chance that he was mistaken. Certainly Billy looked

clean. With Persis opposite him, evidently in a thawing mood, Randolph felt that he could afford to be generous to Billy.

"Randolph," said Persis frankly, "I 've been unfair to you. I can see that you could n't do anything else under the circumstances. Only," she added seriously, "I want you to know positively that Billy is—is splendid. He 's fine and upright and fastidious. If you knew Billy better you 'd know how wonderful he is."

He let it go at that. Of course she was still in love with Billy, but as she grew older she 'd want something more than this rough country boy could give her. He stopped talking about Billy and called her attention to the sweep of the hills, the misty green of the willows. The tea-party was a success.

During the rest of the college year Persis saw little of Randolph, but their relations were on a new and friendlier basis. When they met casually it was with a more intimate recognition. Randolph believed in making haste slowly.

The summer of the great price war in

Stormville Persis spent in a series of visits. Her father was too busy to take a vacation, and so Persis spent a week-end here and another there, and returned to the apartment in New York, in the East Eighties, between visits. It was a life full of new pictures and quick adjustments to different ways of living. It seemed to Persis as though she were meeting people endlessly and never getting to know any of them. She seemed to have entered a new life remote from the old one. It surprised her one day to discover that she could not remember the name of one of her college friends. It was with a greater shock that she found that for an instant Billy's last name escaped her. It came to her in a second—Clintock, of course—but not before she had felt a sudden sharp distrust of herself. This must not be! Why, the name was to be hers in a few months.

But September came and passed, and there was no word from Billy. Billy was in the midst of the price war. His letter came early in October—a hurried, colorless note scarcely reflecting his harassed state. Be-

tween the pain of writing Persis that he could not afford to marry and the constant worry over affairs at the cannery he somehow did not make it clear that he loved her as much as ever. Persis wondered.

By the time her sophomore year was over Persis found that Randolph had come to absorb a larger and larger share of her interest. She had begun specializing in astronomy, partly because he urged it and partly because astronomy appealed to her, and there had been plenty of opportunity for intimate talks. Persis had enjoyed getting to know Randolph better. He was interesting to talk to, and it was something of a relief to turn to a man after being nearly stifled with so many girls. Nevertheless, it was with a feeling of escape that Persis went back to the New York apartment when the college year closed. She had been uneasy, she admitted, at Randolph's slow encroachments. It had been hard to resist the temptation of seeing a good deal of him, yet she felt sure that their friendship had gone far enough. Already it had become a standing joke at college, where

Randolph was always under the watchful scrutiny of hundreds of pairs of curious eyes.

Persis had not seen her father since the Christmas vacation. He had been at the mines at Easter-time, and so she had not gone home. She found him changed. He looked older and seemed worriedly abstracted.

"What 's happened to you, Daddy?" she asked one morning at breakfast. "You don't seem well."

Hamilton started. "Oh, I 'm all right," he said hastily. "Don't you worry about me." But in a moment he grew abstracted again and drummed on the table with his knuckles, staring blankly at the table-cloth. Persis watched him covertly. Something certainly was wrong. Business, she supposed. Her father never told her anything about his business affairs from some mistaken notion that they would worry her.

The maid brought in an unusually large pile of letters. Persis looked them over and recognized the writing of some of the girls at college. What possessed them all to write to her at once? She ripped open the first

letter and read it through silently. Though its content was startling, Persis characteristically read it again without a word. Still silently she opened the second letter. The same amazing contents. But the second letter provided a clue. From it dropped a newspaper clipping.

"Father!" cried Persis, her color rising, "is n't this outrageous? It 's reported I 'm engaged to Randolph. It 's in the 'Adviser' —the town newspaper up there—in the College News column. Is n't that the most abominable thing?"

She was surprised at her father's lack of indignation. He was startled, but not annoyed. Persis rose and flung the letters back on the table. "It 's outrageous," she repeated. She wanted her father to share her indignation, but he seemed strangely apathetic. "Don't you think it 's horrid, Daddy?" she prodded.

"I 'm sorry—it is n't true," said Hamilton.

Persis stood amazed. She had supposed he would always be indignant at the suggestion that she might marry any one—he was

that kind of a parent—yet here he was actually wanting her engaged. "Why, what in the world do you mean?" she asked in a changed voice. "Do you *want* me to be engaged to Randolph?"

Hamilton pushed back his chair. "I suppose I 've got to tell you some time," he said. "I 'm—I 'm in a pretty bad way. The mines are n't doing well. I 'm afraid they 'll have to shut down."

"For Heaven's sake!" said Persis in a matter-of-fact tone. She sat down on the arm of his chair. "Well, don't you worry, Daddy," she said. "We can economize. How bad is it?"

"I 'm in pretty deep," answered Hamilton. "I 've been putting up the money myself to keep things going. I could n't believe the mines were played out.

"Well—" he rose, "there 's just a chance we 'll pull through. There 's going to be an expert report to-day."

"What will it mean if we don't pull through?" asked Persis soberly.

"Oh, we 'll keep going," he assured her.

"I 'll look for something else. But we 'll have to move, anyhow, and I 'm afraid you 'll have to give up college. Don't you worry, anyhow."

But later in the morning, after her father had gone to the office, Persis found that she *was* worrying. "It 's the uncertainty that 's so upsetting," she thought. "If I *knew* everything was all over I 'd go right out and look for a job; but here I 'm all keyed up to do something, and there 's nothing to do." She felt as though she were wandering in circles, trying to use up the energy that the emergency had awakened.

About twelve o'clock the telephone rang, and Randolph Kelsey was announced. Instead of being dismayed, Persis felt relieved. Here was some one who would be understanding and helpful. She was not embarrassed at the prospect of talking with him about the rumor of the engagement. Persis took such things in a matter-of-fact fashion.

Randolph had come to tell her of the "Adviser" announcement. "I can't imagine how they ever got such a report about,"

he said a little tensely. "It 's really—quite —quite disturbing."

"Oh, well, it does n't matter," said Persis. "We 'll just deny it, and that 'll be the end of it."

"I 'll write the 'Adviser' at once," said Randolph. "I 'll have it corrected in the next issue." He was silent a moment before he added in a low voice, "I 'm sorry—it 's not true."

Persis was as startled as she had been when she had heard her father say the same words. For an instant she lost her self-possession. "Why—why—you don't—" she stammered. Her confusion seemed to steady Randolph. He was sitting opposite her, and now he leaned forward and took her hands in his long, trembling fingers. "Could you ever care for me, Persis?" he asked. "Am I anything at all to you?"

Persis looked up at him with her hands still in his. "Randolph," she said, "I do appreciate you, and I 'm very grateful for your friendship. But—but—Billy and I—we *belong* to each other. I 'll never feel toward

any one else the way I feel toward Billy."

His eyes changed, but he did not drop her hands. "But we 'll still be friends?" he asked. "Next year, when you 're back at college—"

"Perhaps I won't be back," she interrupted. "Father 's in the middle of business troubles. I 'd like to talk to you about it if you don't mind. You 're just the person who could advise me." She was glad to get back to impersonal matters. Besides, here was some one of her own generation who understood her point of view.

She explained what she knew of the situation. Randolph listened intently and was emphatic in his advice. "You simply must not give up college," he said. "The next two years and a third for your master's degree will mean all the difference between want and plenty to you later. Here you have a splendid foundation. It would do you no good to leave it where it is. Build the rest, Persis. Keep on with your astronomy, which you love, and I 'll see that you get a first-rate

position as soon as you leave college. It 's work you can always do, whether you marry or not, and I 've talked to you enough to know that you 're not willing to drop everything and be supported by your husband."

"That 's all very well," objected Persis, "and I agree with you. But it is n't as if I had any choice in the matter. I 'm afraid Father won't be able to pay my college bills, and I don't believe I could earn enough to put myself through college."

"Would you be willing to borrow the money?" asked Randolph. "You 'd be able to pay it back in a few years. With a thorough training in astronomy you 'd be earning two or three times as much as you would if you left college now and took some casual job. It 's specialization that pays these days."

Persis considered. "That sounds reasonable," she admitted. "How could I go about it if I decided to try?"

"Let me lend it to you," said Randolph quickly.

"Why, I don't believe I could do that," said Persis slowly. "Certainly not a big sum like that."

"Why not?" asked Randolph. "Is there any reason why a member of the faculty should n't finance a promising student? As a matter of fact, it has often happened. You are unusually good in astronomy; I am interested in your career and feel sure you 'll make a success of it. Let me, simply as a member of the faculty, lend you the money."

"But it is n't true, Randolph, that you 'd be lending it to me as a professor," protested Persis. "You 're my personal friend."

"Exactly," agreed Randolph, "and there you have the real reason why I should do this. Let 's put our friendship on a common-sense basis and forget that I ever tried to change it into something deeper. Have n't I the right, as a friend, to help you? If you heard that I had lent the money to some other girl to help her through college, you 'd be the first to stand up for the idea."

"Of course," agreed Persis.

"Then why are you afraid to take the step

yourself? We 're all at the beginning of a new age in the relationships between men and women. Some of us have to be the pioneers, ready to accept criticism, if necessary, to help the world to see simple matters in a simple way. As a matter of fact, though, there 's no reason why we should be criticized. No one need know about the arrangement."

"I hate concealing things," protested Persis. "I could n't let Daddy know about it, either. He 'd never hear of my borrowing money from you. And, besides, even if I did n't tell him about it how would I explain my staying in college on nothing?"

"Tell him a member of the faculty is financing you. Tell him it 's a scholarship—we 'll call it that—something that does n't involve you financially. This need n't be a business arrangement, you know, Persis. I don't want you to give me your notes for the money."

Persis had not remembered that it was customary to give notes for borrowed money, but she protested at once: "But I *would* give you notes. It 's only on a strictly busi-

ness basis that I could accept the plan at all."

"Well—give me notes if you like," shrugged Randolph. "But—" he smiled—"I won't hold them over you."

"Oh, I know that," laughed Persis, who took it for granted that business relations were on the same cordial footing as social. "I 'm not expecting that you 'll turn me into the street among the snowflakes, but all the same, I 'll accept this obligation (if I decide to) just as strictly as if I were making it with a bank. I 'll give up everything but actual necessities until I pay you back."

The telephone rang as she finished. Absently, with her mind on what he had been saying, Persis answered it. She started at the words that came through he receiver. "Mr. Clintock calling," droned the switchboard operator.

"Ask—ask him to come up," gasped Persis. "It 's Billy!" she said, turning to Randolph. In an instant it came to her that Billy had heard the report of her engagement. And he would find Randolph with her! For a second she felt like the heroine of a French

farce. She almost giggled. But her amusement was swept aside by the thought that if Billy believed the report he must be desolate. Poor Billy!

Randolph, who had risen when she went to the telephone, stood silently in the center of the room, his head bent, his arms loosely folded. Persis reflected that Billy would see him as soon as she opened the door of the apartment, for a wide double doorway led from the entrance-hall into the living-room.

The bell rang, and Persis opened the door. Billy stood outside, an older Billy than she had known the year before, with a more serious and set expression. Persis put both her hands in his, but he seemed to hold her off. He was looking beyond her at Randolph. Unexpectedly he dropped her hands, came in, and closed the door.

"Are you engaged to Randolph Kelsey?" he asked in a low, strained voice. Persis was ruffled. His very distrust of her made her vehement denial die on her lips.

"Of course not," she answered expressionlessly.

"It was in a paper I take," said Billy stiffly. He had gone through a bitter period of uncertainty, and he could not immediately get back to his unquestioning faith in Persis. He walked into the living-room and stood before Randolph. "How did this happen?" he asked.

Randolph was in no hurry to answer. His glance of appraisal suggested that Billy was intruding.

"Well?" demanded Billy, his anger rising.

Persis explained hastily. "But I suppose it does n't make much difference," she ended. "Everybody believed it before, and now that it 's denied perhaps they 'll stop talking."

"*Why* did everybody believe it?" asked Billy.

"Oh, I don't know," sighed Persis. "I suppose because girls at college are so hungry for romance they 'll cook one up at the slightest excuse."

"There should n't have been the slightest excuse," said Billy.

Randolph smiled. His calmness contrasted

with Billy's heat. He had kept aloof from the discussion though Billy had tried several times to bring him into it. His remoteness exasperated Billy. "A teacher in a college ought not to have anything to do with the girls outside the class-room," he said. Billy had not been brought up in Stormville for nothing.

"How absurd!" cried Persis indignantly. "Do you mean to say Randolph should n't ask me to tea or to skate with him?"

"Not while you 're his pupil," said Billy doggedly.

"I never heard such nonsense!" exploded Persis. "Why I never dreamed you had those provincial ideas."

Billy did not like that word "provincial." "I did n't suppose," he returned, "that you 'd enjoy having it reported that you were engaged to Randolph."

"It does n't make the slightest difference to me what people say about me," flashed Persis. "It 's such sheer nonsense to restrict the perfectly free, natural friendships men and

women can have. I 've always believed in acting like a sensible human being and letting people talk if they wanted to. I thought you felt the same way. Why—" she suddenly remembered—"you did n't mind the entirely unconventional way I went off on picnics with you."

"That was different," said Billy.

"Well, I don't see it," retorted Persis, "and if we 're ever going to be happily married you 'll have to get used to the idea that I don't expect to live in a harem. Why, it never occurred to me that you had these outworn, old-fashioned ideas."

Billy was a little taken off his feet. He had never examined the standards he had been brought up with. Nevertheless, he was not ready to give them up at a moment's notice. "And I say," he retorted, "that if we 're going to be happily married you 'll have to give up philandering with other men."

Persis did not see that Billy's jealousy arose from the distrust of her that had entered his thoughts in the black hours when he had

believed that she was engaged to Randolph. She did not see that if they had not been separated by months of silence he would not have believed the report. All she saw was that hateful word "philandering." "I don't think you need to say anything more, Billy," she said evenly.

Billy stood silent a moment. The instant he had spoken he had known that he had been unjust. He believed that self-control was a fundamental virtue. Why had he lost his temper—and with Persis? It was unpardonable. It never occurred to him to excuse himself by pointing to the sleepless nights he had passed, to his terrific headache or the black hours of hopelessness he had been through. Billy was not one to palliate his sins. "Perhaps—perhaps—" he stammered, "if I could see you alone—without any interference—we 'd straighten things out."

But Persis was still angry. "I don't see that Randolph has been precisely interfering," she remarked.

Billy looked at Randolph, so maddeningly

impeccable in his attitude of aloofness. "Randolph's speciality is keeping quiet," he observed.

Persis understood. "Randolph has explained that to me," she said curtly.

Randolph stirred and held out his hand to Persis. "I 'm afraid I have n't helped things any," he said gently. "I 'll leave Billy to 'straighten things out.' Good-by." It was a long hand-clasp. Persis reacted. During the last hour she had told Randolph that she loved Billy and Billy alone, and on top of it he had come to her rescue with his generous offer to put her through college. It was only just to show Randolph that she appreciated him. "Will you come again this evening?" she asked, "I want to finish what we were talking about."

Billy started. "I 'll go at once," he said. "I did n't realize that I had interrupted you." Quickly he took her hand—the hand that used to respond instantly to the vibration of his clasp, and that now lay cold in his. "Good-by," he said. He had gone before Persis could reach the door. She had intended to

say one last word to him, something that would show him that down beneath her anger she still loved him, but he had not lingered on the way out.

Randolph left very soon. There was no life to their talk after Billy had gone. Persis went back to her room, dropped on the bed, and sobbed. She felt as though her world was crashing about her head. Could it be possible that her adored Billy was nothing but a narrow-minded country boy? But she reacted instantly from that thought. Billy was able to face any question squarely. Open-mindedness was the essential, not any particular opinion. If they had simply talked over some of these ideas of hers when they were both dispassionate and impersonal, of course he 'd have understood. She began to see dimly that Billy would not be jealous once he knew that she loved him and him alone. Still Billy was that dark, intense type that in all her literary experience stood for jealousy. Who ever heard of a jealous blond? She herself was a blond, and she was not jealous. She would not mind in the least if Billy took

tea at an inn with another girl. But if she heard that he was engaged to her? Well, that *would* be a blow. Poor Billy! He must have suffered before he heard the truth. She would write to him to-morrow.

But her letter turned out to be one of those tragic ones that belong in a heartbreaking volume of blank pages—a letter that never was written. And Billy's letter to her was one of an equally tragic collection, a letter that ought to have remained unwritten. That evening David Hamilton broke the news that the business had crumbled. The report of the specialists had been the final blow to the tottering structure. "I 've saved up enough for us to scrape along on," he told Persis, "but you 'll have to leave college. Thank God, you won't have to go into an office somewhere. We 'll have to skimp, but you 'll be in your own home, not slaving for some one else."

The words brought no sense of thankfulness to Persis. She felt that it would be much more lively to work outside the home than in it. Her youthful energy would be cramped

inside the narrow walls of an apartment. Poor Daddy! Always struggling to give her something she did not want. He had a touch of the harem idea himself. He wanted to keep his daughter from any real contact with the world.

That night Persis lay awake reconstructing her universe. Before she slept she decided to accept Randolph's advice. She felt sure that it was sound.

The next morning's mail brought a tactful, friendly letter from Randolph renewing his offer of help. How devoted he was! Persis reflected. No one ever had a truer friend. It was while she was in this mood that she opened Billy's letter, the letter that should never have been written. Billy made no attempt to find excuses for himself. "I can hardly believe it was I who spoke to you that way to-day," he wrote. "I 'll never forgive myself. And you were right when you said that my ideas are provincial. I don't suppose they could be anything else. I 'll try to look fairly at every opinion you hold, dearest, and be convinced if I possibly can be. There

can't be any real barrier between us. I suppose I 'm too given to feeling that I 'm a kind of old breakwater that must protect you from the full force of the waves. Of course there is n't any real reason why you should n't meet your own problems in your own way if you want to. All the same, Persis, one thing I 've got to get off my chest. Don't be taken in by Randolph. I hate to go behind him in this way, but I 've known him ever since he was a kid cheating us smaller boys out of our marbles, and I know he 's no good, back of all his brains and manners."

Persis crumpled the letter. After the way Randolph had acted in a crisis she was not willing to hear anything against him. She would write and tell Billy what Randolph had done. But on second thoughts she realized that Billy, with his Stormville standards, would never, never, understand. What was the use of trying to explain? Billy's distrust of Randolph would prejudice him. So she put off writing, and in the end did not write at all. Now that she had to think seriously of supporting herself, she could not con-

sider marrying for the present. Perhaps she ought to break her engagement to Billy. But she could not bear to do that. She would just let things drift. Perhaps her problems would solve themselves.

Billy, back in Stormville, looked for her letter every day. At first he could not believe that she did not intend to write, but after two weeks he ceased to be the first comer at the post-office window. Evidently Persis had nothing to say to him. Billy took her silence as his dismissal.

# CHAPTER X

## BILLY BEGINS TO SHOW SIGNS OF SENSE

AFTER the end of the great price war, Billy's business affairs prospered. Prices of canned sea-food went so high that Paul sold out his stock with a good profit and was able to set aside adequate reserves to protect the business. The cannery was now on a paying basis, and Billy sold some of his stock. He needed capital for his own business ventures.

For several years Billy devoted all his attention to work. He increased his remodeled car business by adding an automobile wrecking department. In course of time, when he came across the right men to work with, he opened branches in Boston and Springfield, and started extensive newspaper advertising. He made a specialty of spare parts, as well as remodeled cars, and

started a garage in connection with each branch office. Billy decided that there was room for a chain of trustworthy garages.

As a side-line—for Billy liked to disregard the proverb about avoiding too many irons in the fire, and preferred to quote instead the one counseling against putting all your eggs in one basket—he bought as many of Silas Clintock's houses as he could afford. These he remodeled slightly and sold to the summer people who were beginning to snap up old houses. Stormville had an artist colony. The fact that the houses were well built and that Billy's improvements had not spoiled their charm made them go like hot cakes. Perhaps the ghost of Silas Clinstock was pleased. At any rate, Billy took a peculiar satisfaction in profiting by his ancestor's conscientious work.

Occasionally Billy dropped in to see his mother and father. His mother talked chiefly of Jimmy, who was becoming, she assured him, one of the social leaders of Stormville. She admitted that he was only getting twenty-five dollars a week, but argued that his

meager salary was outweighed by his increasing responsibilities. He was his uncle's right-hand man, the one to whom James gave all the extra work that he could not trust to anybody else.

William Clintock had not changed. When Billy came he always looked up from his paper with a pleased greeting, but after a few words on the Presidential outlook he relapsed once more behind the screen that kept home and family from him.

Jimmy treated his brother with polite condescension. Secure in his belief that he now had the upper hand, he was no longer jealous of Billy. To some extent, Jimmy was copying his uncle's manner, practising for the future; but he never quite equaled his model. Where James bellowed, Jimmy blustered. James, being sure of his importance, assumed it as the judge assumes his robe; Jimmy, whose spindly appearance could never attract attention, was forever declaiming at the top of his voice that as the heir-apparent he was worthy of notice. But he could never hold his

audience. He was an orator with a squeaky voice.

Though Uncle James continued to be the great man of Stormville, his orbit seldom touched Billy's. For the first year or two after Billy's break with Persis Uncle James passed Billy with a glassy stare when they chanced to meet on the street. Then came an event which was not chronicled in the Stormville weekly, but which, nevertheless, was of the utmost significance to the entire town. Billy and Uncle James met on a street-crossing—and James bowed! He solemnly and definitely touched his hat. Billy almost got run over.

The next time they met Uncle James waved his hand in greeting and said, "You 're looking well." Billy was dumfounded. He went home and carefully inspected himself in the mirror. He was interested to see that he had lost his boyish lines and was looking quite definitely an adult, but he could not see any change that would seem to justify the special notice of his mighty uncle.

Several days later as Billy was closing his desk after an encouraging inventory that showed that he now had twenty-five thousand dollars to his credit, of which eight thousand had been added during the last year, the door opened—and in walked Uncle James. Uncle James himself.

Billy rose and greeted his uncle tentatively. Came he in peace here or came he in war? Uncle James took a chair. Upon another he placed his hat, placed it with a free, generous gesture which served as an introduction to his first words. "Billy," he said, "this should n't be. There should n't be any ill feeling between uncle and nephew. We ought to stand together. I ought to be the best friend you 've got. I admit it." Magnanimity could go no further.

Billy slowly dropped his keys, still dangling from his hand, into his pocket. He said nothing. He was waiting until Uncle James put the rest of his cards on the table. One ace was all very well, but Billy wanted to see the rest.

"Billy," said Uncle James, laying down an-

other ace, "I 'm going to give you your chance. I am going to let you buy—"

Billy managed to control himself.

"—some stock in the Peters cannery!"

Billy remained silent, presumably overcome by emotion.

"I 'm going to issue twenty thousand dollars' worth of stock," continued Uncle James, "stock that has every chance of paying twenty per cent. Now, then," he finished, "what do you say?"

Billy put his hands in his pockets and studied the floor, walking slowly about. "Uncle James," he said in a moment, "I 'm so tied up that I have n't money to buy a hat. I 've got three houses on my hands that I won't be able to sell till May or June. I 've got any number of automobiles on hand, and some money tied up in the Street cannery and in this auto wrecking company. Any money I do get I have to put right back into the business. I appreciate the opportunity to come in, Uncle James, and I 'm awfully sorry I can't, but of course stock like yours can sell somewhere else in a minute."

Uncle James shifted. "I realized you were getting to be quite a power in the town, but I did n't know you were getting so many investments. Well—I tell you what. You come out and take dinner with me to-night. We 'll go down to the hotel now. I 'd like to talk over a few things with you."

Billy accepted soberly, but as he went for his hat there was a suggestion of a smile at the corners of his mouth.

Together Uncle James and Billy walked in the dusk through the streets of Stormville. Had Uncle James realized the contrast they made he might have bidden Billy meet him later at the hotel. Billy had to check his natural stride to keep in step with his portly uncle. His vigorous youth brought out the flabbiness that self-indulgence had handed out to James. His beautifully shaped mouth, just slightly curved into an expression of scornful amusement, contrasted sharply with the line, sucked inward, that separated James's beak of a nose from his upward-curving chin.

Yet to one person, at least, the sight of James and Billy together brought an emotion

that was neither scorn of James nor admiration for Billy. Henrietta was passing the hotel when the two entered. Her emotion was just what it might have been had she seen the shade of Washington communing with the ghost of George III.

Billy and James, nevertheless, entered the red brick hotel as though they had dined together every night of their lives. This was not the inn where the summer people stayed, but the business hotel, where salesmen put up. Yet, somehow, it stood for more than the inn to the people of Stormville, perhaps because it was a more intimate part of their lives. Great occasions were celebrated at the hotel, never at the inn.

Before the dinner had begun Euphemia and Jimmy were discussing it at white heat. Henrietta had rushed home to spread the news, and Bessie had streaked over to the Clintock house to find out what was up. Henrietta was back at the hotel in time to see Billy begin on the soup. Happily James had chosen a table by the window. Wilhelmina arrived at the instant when James was pressing

Billy to accept another piece of chicken. Twenty minutes later Bessie and Euphemia collided outside, the collision being inevitable, since both were walking with their eyes on a window which disclosed Billy making good headway with a large plate of peach ice-cream while Uncle James gently laid a lady-finger upon his nephew's plate.

That night Billy slept better than any other member of his family.

The gist of the "matters" that Uncle James had to discuss was that the Peters cannery was in an unusually flourishing condition and needed but a little new capital to put a last polish on its bright future. After long deliberation, Billy thought he *might* be able to raise five thousand dollars "from friends," but not to put into stock. No, he was afraid his friends would insist on a mortgage on the plant. Uncle James hastily swirled his brush on his palate and laid some more bright colors on his picture, begging Billy to present the picture to his friends and explain to them that stock would be an infinitely better investment than a mortgage.

Billy held out little hope that his friends would see it that way, but over the finger-bowls he promised to approach them on the subject of the mortgage.

As Billy threw his napkin on the table and pushed back his chair, Euphemia arrived at her simple home and was greeted with a sight which might have been entitled "Jimmy in a Rage."

"Is it true?" cried Jimmy.

"Yes, they 're eating down at the hotel now," replied his mother. "Is n't that nice?"

"Nice!" shouted Jimmy. "Nice for that worthless cad who 's deserted the family to come in and cut us all out? Here I 've slaved for years and that—that second-hand automobile-scavenger comes in at the last moment —and you call it nice!"

"Who would have thought Billy was as smart as that?" mused Euphemia.

"Smart? Are you standing up for that scoundrel? How did he manage to get around Uncle James? Uncle James is getting soft in his head. He locks everything up from me."

"Billy was always an awfully good boy," remarked Euphemia. "You know he gave me this nice coat a little while ago."

"I was wondering where it came from," exploded Jimmy. "So that 's his way of getting around people! I 'm not going to stand for it!"

William Clintock shuffled into the room. "Something upset you, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Billy 's taking dinner with Uncle James," vociferated Jimmy, as though he brought a criminal charge.

"Well that 's real nice, is n't it?" said William, looking hopefully at his wife.

"It 's infernal rascality; that 's what it is!" cried Jimmy.

"Now, Jimmy," protested Euphemia, "there 's nothing wrong in accepting an invitation to dinner."

"Mother, if you 're going to stand up for him I 'll leave this house," blustered Jimmy.

"Now, Jimmy, if he gets the money he won't forget us," argued Euphemia. "He always was a good boy—always looking after the family. We 'll have him here to supper

to-morrow night. Jimmy, on your way to the office stop in and ask Mrs. Ward if she has a good chicken."

"Chicken!" exploded Jimmy. "If that man comes here to supper to-morrow night I go out!" Jimmy put on his hat as though to emphasize his resounding period and strode from the house, slamming the door for extra emphasis.

"Is n't it too bad Jimmy takes it so hard," remarked Euphemia. "Billy always was the calm one. He has lots of self-control, Billy has."

Next day, further consequences. Pemberton, Stormville's leading confectioner, was selling five pounds of candy for a dollar, a bargain that Billy could not resist, even though the candy had been in the window for several days and had not proved sun-fast.

With five pounds of candy under his arm, Billy felt ready to face the world, even Henrietta, who, walking by the candy-store, had seen Billy within and had suddenly remembered an urgent errand at Pemberton's.

Henrietta had been rather cool to Billy for

the last year or two, and so he was just a little surprised at her cordial greeting until he remembered where he had been the evening before. Just to see how much he had gone up in Henrietta's opinion Billy asked her to have a glass of soda, an invitation which was instantly accepted.

"Billy," said Henrietta, whipping the glass from the bottom, "why don't you come and see me some time?" Billy silently noted that she had said "me," not "us."

It was not altogether innocently that he answered, "Why, to tell you the truth, Henrietta, I have so many business matters to attend to that I 'm just going from one thing to the other all day long."

Said Henrietta: "Have you that nice little red boat this year, Billy? I 'd love to go out in it some time."

"I 'd be delighted to take you—both," replied Billy wickedly.

"Oh, Wilhelmina hates the water," Henrietta assured him.

"Well, we 'll make it a land party," offered Billy with the utmost amiability.

Henrietta pushed back her empty glass. "Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't ask us together," she exploded. "Sisters see so much of each other at home that they get tired of each other."

"All right"—still Billy strove to please—"I 'll take you—alternately." Which was altogether annoying to Henrietta, who knew full well that Wilhelmina was rounder and pinker and curlier than she, and considerably more cuddlesome, and always managing to go Henrietta one better.

However, Henrietta made the best of it. "Let 's see; when shall we go?" she asked, as though Billy's invitation had been definite.

"Well," hedged Billy, "I 'm awfully busy at the moment—"

"All right," interrupted Henrietta, "then we 'll make it the end of the week. Say Thursday. I 'll be at the boat-landing, at twelve o'clock and bring some lunch. Do you like chicken, Billy?"

With a sigh Billy agreed to be there, but he was worse than bored at the prospect. He did not want to see another girl taking Persis' place in the red motor-boat.

Henrietta was not endowed with the long-headedness that distinguished the rest of the family. Neither her mother nor Wilhelmina would have made the mistake of calling the world's attention to the fish for which she had cast her bait. But Henrietta, coming out of the candy-store with Billy, took pains to walk the way he was going. Along Main Street she walked, chattering archly, and lingering by the way as much as she consistently could. And instead of being annoyed when she saw Wilhelmina coming, she was distinctly pleased. At last she had gone Wilhelmina one better!

Wilhelmina stopped to speak to her sister and her third cousin Billy, and Henrietta was pleased to see that her smile was forced. Bitterness was in the eyes of Wilhelmina when she perceived that her sister had accidentally stumbled on an idea which, as it happened, she herself had deliberately evolved. Said Henrietta, unworthy of her careful training, "Billy and I are going on a picnic Thursday" —an inexcusable strategic error.

On the way home Wilhelmina racked her

brain for some means of going Henrietta one better, and the Kelsey household became, like the Clintock household, a divided camp.

That night Billy went to his father's house to supper, and he did not fail to note that Jimmy was significantly absent and that Euphemia had brought forth the asparagus-tongs. He noted, too, that when he casually mentioned having seen his cousins, Henrietta and Wilhelmina, she pounced upon the information and openly urged Billy to beware of the wiles of designing women. "It seems as if I always had something to worry about," sighed Euphemia.

The next day Billy reported to his uncle that he had raised the five thousand dollars, but that it must be secured by a mortgage on the cannery. Uncle James offered Billy stock and notes, and otherwise tried to dodge, but Billy was adamant. At last Uncle James produced a counter-offer. "Make it ten thousand," he said, "and I'll give you a mortgage." Billy did some figuring and decided that he could just do it. He had a pretty good idea that the price war had cost

Uncle James a large amount, and that the Peters cannery was in a bad way. He did not know, however, about the failure of the tin-mines in which James, as well as David Hamilton, was so vitally interested.

By the end of the week Billy held the mortgage. Uncle James was kindness itself. He suggested that Billy could save the fee that it would cost to have the mortgage recorded. "I 'll take it up in a month or two," he explained, "so you need n't take the trouble to record it." Billy thanked his uncle for this helpful bit of advice, but, being an energetic young man and not averse to trouble, he went hotfoot to the county clerk's office five minutes later and attended to the technical and legal side of the matter.

The mortgage transaction was conducted as secretly as possible, and no one in Stormville was the wiser. Even a whisper that there was anything wrong with the Peters cannery would have thrown Stormville into a panic.

If Henrietta enjoyed her picnic with Billy, Wilhelmina certainly did her best to drop

a fly into the ointment. However, Wilhelmina's efforts but added to her sister's satisfaction.

"Billy is a peach," said Henrietta as she came home from the picnic. "I tell you, Mina, you don't half appreciate Billy."

"Well, I can't say I 'm crazy about him," was Wilhelmina's offhand reply. "He 's got too many irons in the fire, Billy has. I was talking to Uncle James about him to-day."

Henrietta pricked up her ears. "Have you been running Billy down to Uncle James?" she demanded. "Where 'd you see Uncle James?"

"I took lunch with him," replied Wilhelmina airily.

But her announcement fell flat. A week before, Henrietta would have felt that Wilhelmina had scored a triumph, but now she was too sure that she was ahead in the game to mind. "What did he say about Billy?" she demanded, with an air of proprietorship.

"Oh, nothing much," replied her sister, idly replacing a stray lock, "I just told him you had a crush on Billy but that for my part I thought

Billy was just a bright boy doing about as well as he 'd ever do, and he agreed with me."

Henrietta changed the subject—apparently. But when she said, "Mother just gave me Grandma's Paisley shawl," she really remarked: "Mother thinks I 'm ahead. *She 's* backing me." She added casually: "I 'm going to have it made into an evening wrap. I think Mother 'll give me her brown fox furs for collar and cuffs." Which was equivalent to saying, "I 've got the best of you this time!"

Again Henrietta had made a strategical error. Though Wilhelmina replied politely, there was a tremor in her voice. She now wholeheartedly hated her sister and vowed revenge.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ALLIANCES ARE REARRANGED

FOR a few days Billy tried to keep away from Henrietta, to decline her invitations and steel himself against her. But Billy was lonely. He had not realized it before, when no one was paying any attention to him, but now that he was being violently made up to he began to see how arid his life was. Of course he knew that Henrietta was chiefly interested in him as the prospective heir to Uncle James's wealth, but he could hardly blame her for being a victim to the Uncle James idea. He knew only too well the mighty clutch of the monster. Poor Henrietta!

And it was nice to be admired, listened to, sympathized with. Of course he discounted 99 per cent of Henrietta's interest in him, but he wondered if perhaps 1 per cent of it was

not genuine. He hoped Henrietta liked him just a little bit for himself. Not that he could ever fall in love with Henrietta—that part of him was for ever dedicated to Persis—but he did like to feel that some one took a human interest in him.

As a matter of fact, a certain part of Henrietta's interest in him *was* genuine. Billy's good looks and courage appealed to Henrietta. She had no intention of allowing her heart to lead, but at least it came thumping along close after her head. It was perhaps urging her head forward, though Henrietta did not realize it.

Henrietta had never had a warm attachment in her life, and she unconsciously sought something that she could cling to, something substantial. Here was the perfect combination: some one whom she could really love who at the same time realized her life's ambition in the Uncle James direction. She worked on Billy's barriers until they went down, and after that she saw him almost daily. She was always planning a party of some sort, with careful consideration of Billy's tastes.

It was a relief to Billy to play a little after his years of steady work, and it was more than a relief to have some human intercourse. Though Henrietta steered him away from the pretty girls of Stormville, Billy was content to talk to the plain ones. He felt that he had been getting self-centered alone in his barn, and he wanted to find out how other people thought and felt.

And so it happened one evening that Henrietta and Wilhelmina were dressing for a dance to which Henrietta was going with Billy. Wilhelmina had been ignominiously forced to accept the escort of her brother Randolph, just home from college for the summer vacation—a humiliating position, especially as the accepting of Randolph's escort was in reality the drafting of Randolph's services.

Wilhelmina had not mentioned to Randolph that Billy was to be of the party lest Billy's anticipated presence involve Randolph's absence. It was well known in the Kelsey household that Randolph had no love for Billy.

In their second-floor-back room the girls were getting into their evening-gowns. Henrietta had of course selected her new vermilion chiffon, but Wilhelmina, with surprising stubbornness, was bent upon wearing her old crimson silk rather than the more appropriate yellow tulle that she had had made expressly for the occasion. Henrietta wondered at her sister's contrariness. Not so their mother, the master-mind of the family.

"Henrietta dear," said Bessie, as she hooked up the vermilion chiffon, "don't you want to wear Mother's gold comb?"—the sacred gold comb, which held in Bessie's heart the place occupied in Euphemia's by the asparagus-tongs.

Wilhelmina stamped her foot. "That old thing! Why, you 'll look as if you were dug up, Hen."

"You 're horrid, Mina," cried Henrietta, throwing her arms around her mother. "I 'd *love* to wear it, Mama. It 'll look too cute for anything with my hair done high, this way."

Wilhelmina turned from them and ran to

the spare room. She tore off her crimson dress, yanking at the hooks and tearing the lace. She kicked off her gold slippers and flung herself on the bed. When her mother came after her she stormed, "I 'm not going to the old dance!"

"Now, Mina dear," remonstrated Bessie, "don't get your eyes all red. Mama 's so proud of her two beautiful daughters. I love to see you all dressed up and going out together. You go and have a good time, and don't put a spoke in Hennie's wheel. Think how nice it 'll be to have a sister rolling in money. Think how mad Cousin Euphemia will be when Hennie walks off with Billy and the money, too. It 's always the wife that counts; and Hennie will see to it that the rest of the family don't work Billy."

"Billy does n't care two pins for Henrietta," sobbed Wilhelmina. "*I* know. *I* can tell."

"Nonsense!" said Bessie. "Billy 's never been anywhere or seen anything, and he 'll go wild over Hennie in no time. He 's mighty lucky to get a pretty girl like Hennie. No, dear, I know she 's not as pretty as you, but

your time will come; don't you worry. I 'd rather get Hennie off my hands first because she 's the least attractive."

"I can't *bear* Billy," stormed Wilhelmina. "I can't bear to have him look at me. Besides, Henrietta 's not in love with him. It 's *wrong* to marry a man you 're not in love with."

"Why, of course it is, dear," soothed Bessie. "But she 'll fall in love with him the minute she thinks it 's wise. You 'll see. They 'll be as happy as two turtle-doves—"

Wilhelmina bounced from the bed and rushed from the room, slamming the door. Bessie picked up her daughter's dress and shook her head over the torn lace. "I ought to have known better," she sighed. She hung up the dress in the hall closet where the best clothes were kept, and went to her own room to get the comb. Back in her daughters' room she found Henrietta folding the Paisley wrap over her vermilion dress.

"Here it is, dear," said Bessie. "Let me put it in. And be nice to Mina in the morning. She 's not going, and I 'm just as glad,

because that crimson dress of hers does make yours look sick."

"Thanks," said Henrietta, carefully inserting the comb before the mirror. "Say, that looks swell." She turned her head to admire it at different angles. "I 'll be nice to Mina if she 's nice to me, but she 's got to learn how to treat me." To Henrietta Wilhelmina was already a poor relation.

In the attic Wilhelmina was listening for her sister's departure. As Henrietta's voice trailed down the stairs Wilhelmina darted back to their room and feverishly searched in the closet for her Sunday clothes. Behind locked doors she dressed quickly but carefully. She paused a moment, motionless, when she heard Billy's voice down-stairs. She made no movement until she heard the door slam.

From the window in the next room Bessie watched Henrietta step into Billy's car. How well Henrietta held herself! She had not Wilhelmina's cute ways, but, after all, she was more dignified—as if she felt she *was*

somebody. Bessie went to tell Randolph that Wilhelmina had changed her mind and was not going. Of course Randolph was annoyed, and it took all her diplomacy to persuade him to look in at the dance later on. She wanted Stormville to see what a distinguished son she had. Euphemia's boys could not touch him.

Meanwhile Wilhelmina was slipping hastily into the black velvet gown that made her hair glow in contrast, and the black and silver hat that she had made herself. She emphasized the bend in the hat, and looked at herself in the glass with half-closed eyes. She turned her head slightly and looked again at her reflections, curving her lips into the suggestion of a smile. She picked up her lip-stick and carefully traced her lips, drawing them tight over her teeth. She closed her lips and stood off to see the effect. Suddenly, as though she had changed her mind, she took a damp face-cloth from the wash-stand and wiped away the lip-stick red.

"That 's better," she nodded to herself in the mirror. She put on her coat and went

quickly down-stairs. The gold comb had changed her life.

With her hand on the door-knob Wilhelmina paused, attracted by something on the hat-stand. She went back and picked it up. It was a brown glove—Billy's. It lay on her hand, a model of Billy's big hand. In spite of its limp hollowness, there was something vigorous about it. Wilhelmina looked at it, breathing hard. Suddenly she crushed it in her fingers, flung it as far away as she could, and went out of the door, closing it softly behind her.

Henrietta queened it over Stormville that night. In her own imagination she was already the great lady of the place, and this inner conviction gave her a poise that made Stormville gasp. Moreover, Billy had invested in a Tuxedo. Even Jimmy's dress suit—one of the few that Stormville boasted—seemed to be eclipsed by Billy's Tuxedo. Certainly full dress ought to outshine semi-dress. Why didn't it? Savagely Jimmy saw that there was a suggestion of superiority in the very fact that Billy was not in full dress.

"This is an informal little dance," he seemed to suggest. "I just slipped on my dinner-jacket."

Jimmy's eyes passed from Billy to Henrietta and read her thoughts. "I am the leading lady of Stormville," she seemed to say, "because of my escort, heir of James Randolph Peters."

Jimmy sauntered up to Billy. "Fits you well—for a rented suit. Got this dance taken, Henrietta?"

"Yes—with Billy," answered Henrietta icily. She did not want her great moment spoiled by a joke in poor taste.

"Darn those brats of Cousin Bessie's," muttered Jimmy, moving away. He retired to a corner and glowered.

Before the evening was over, however, Jimmy had found a friend, not a permanent one, perhaps, but at least a warm one for the time being. Randolph had decided that as long as he had taken the trouble to dress he might as well go to the hick dance. Somehow or other he took more pleasure in impressing Stormville than in shining in the far

more sophisticated circles in which he now moved. Accordingly, at a properly late hour, Randolph sauntered into the large room at the top of the town hall where big dances were held. Randolph was quite sure that he would find plenty of girls ready to turn over to him the dances they had promised to other men.

The first thing that Randolph saw was Henrietta parading with Billy, talking to Billy, positively trying to flirt with him.

At the earliest opportunity Randolph drew his sister aside. "Have n't you any better sense than to be seen with that mutt?" he demanded, descending into the language of Stormville's younger set. Henrietta waved her fan, after the manner of the vamps of the movies.

"Billy is quite *in* now," she condescended to explain. She could not help adding, though she knew it was unwise, "Especially with Uncle James."

Randolph drew his eyebrows together. "Who says so?" he demanded.

"Why, *everybody,*" Henrietta replied.

"He 's always taking dinner with Uncle James and going to his private office and so on."

It was a blow to Randolph. He had counted Billy out of the running entirely. He saw Henrietta's game immediately. "Look here, Hen," he said, trying to be pleasant, "don't throw yourself away on Billy. I don't want to have any more poor relations on my hands. They 're an awful drag on a person who wants to get on in the world."

"Just the way I feel," returned Henrietta sweetly. "But I 'll always ask you to dinner, Randolph."

Billy in all his glory came up to claim a dance. "I say, Randolph," he said, "there's something I want to talk to you about. Can I see you some time to-morrow?"

"I 'm afraid not," said Randolph coldly; "my time 's pretty well taken up." He turned away, just in time to catch Jimmy, across the room, glaring at Billy. Randolph joined his cousin. He wanted to know just how matters stood between Billy and Uncle

James. Jimmy was in the office. He ought to know. That Jimmy and Billy were not on good terms was common knowledge in Stormville.

With just a little preliminary priming Randolph succeeded in pumping from Jimmy what he wanted to know. Flattered by Randolph's attention, Jimmy told him what little he knew about Billy's connection with his uncle's affairs. Randolph pondered. What did Uncle James want with Billy? Evidently it was Uncle James who had sought out Billy, not the other way round. Something was up. Randolph made up his mind to find out what it was. His mathematical mind might be able to piece together the broken bits that meant nothing to Jimmy.

The dance ended with some of the old alliances broken up and new ones formed. Randolph and Henrietta were now on bad terms, and Randolph and Jimmy on good terms. And Wilhelmina, who had parted from Henrietta in a rage, sat up in bed when her sister came in and took a sisterly interest

in the dance. She was so glad Hen had had a good time, and so glad Billy had looked well. In fact, her friendliness and lack of jealousy spoiled half of Henrietta's pleasure when she rehearsed the story of her triumphs.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE WORLD IS TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

NEXT day Randolph followed up his new intimacy with Jimmy. He stopped in at the cannery, and, finding that his uncle was away for the day, made the best of the opportunity by talking over the business with Jimmy. Since Randolph was a stockholder, Jimmy felt justified in telling him everything he knew, and even showing him some of the books. Randolph left in the middle of the afternoon with his brows heavily contracted.

Jimmy went home with a new feeling of importance. Birds of a feather were flocking together, he assured himself. How natural it was that the two men of the world in the family should be friends.

Jimmy reached the Clintock front door and took out his key, but before he had time to

insert it he was arrested by hurrying footsteps behind him. Turning, he saw the panting form of Cousin Bessie tear up the wooden steps. She could not speak, but she gestured to him to open the door. Once inside she gasped, "Euphemia!" and sank upon a chair.

"Mother!" called Jimmy, more effectively.

Euphemia came running out of the kitchen, enveloped in a blue apron. "What 's happened?" she cried. She knew that some calamity impended and that it concerned James. Nothing else ever brought Bessie to the house.

Bessie closed her eyes. "It 's all over," she groaned.

"He 's not dead!" gasped Euphemia, with mixed emotions.

Bessie shook her head both ways and waited until she had recovered her breath before she spoke. "I was in Hipp's," she began. Hipp was the local jeweler. "I went to have my watch mended. It 's stopped again."

"Yes, yes, go on," urged Euphemia.

"And Mr. Hipp said—oh, you 'd never believe it, Euphemia—he said: 'Your cousin,

Mr. Peters, was in here to-day. He seems to be getting married.' "

"What?" cried Euphemia.

"No!" shouted Jimmy.

"Yes," declared Bessie, "that 's what he said, and he told me James had bought a wedding-ring and charged it. Now what do you think of that?"

"It 's the most outrageous thing I ever heard," was what Euphemia thought of it.

"Who is it? Who is it?" demanded Jimmy, as though he merely waited for the name before rushing out to slay the lady.

"I have n't the least idea," mourned Bessie, tragedy brooding on her plump face. "Unless it 's somebody at the office. Is it, do you think, Jimmy?"

"I *know* it is n't," said Jimmy stalwartly, clearing himself of all blame. "I 've watched carefully to see that nobody makes up to Uncle James."

"I sent Henrietta around to talk to Freda," went on Bessie. Freda was James's cook. "The girls always give Freda a Christmas present, and she tells them lots of

things." A shade crossed Euphemia's face. Here was a point she had neglected.

"It could n't be Susanna Tumpkins," reasoned Bessie, "for she 's been sick a week with asthma. And I know James does n't care for Jim Bartlett's widow any more, since I told him that story about the plate she threw at her brother. And it can't be Alice Smith—"

Euphemia wrung her hands. "We 've got to find out and stop it," she declared. "How did James seem to-day, Jimmy?"

"He was n't at the office," said Jimmy savagely.

"When I find out who it is I 'll make her suffer. You 'll see," said Bessie with set lips.

The group sank into a feverish silence, through which broke hurrying footsteps on the wooden porch outside, and a quick jerk of the bell. Euphemia ran to the door. Into the hall burst Henrietta. "Is Mama here?" she asked, running into the parlor as she spoke. "Mama! Mama! I 've found out!" she cried.

"Who is it?" demanded Bessie.

Henrietta looked hurriedly around the group. Her face was white and her eyes black with fury. "I think I 'd better tell you alone," she said.

"Nonsense!" cried her exasperated mother, "if James is going to be married, it 's no secret."

"All right, then," cried Henrietta angrily, "I 'll tell you—and if you don't like it it 's your own fault! He 's going to marry Wilhelmina!"

Euphemia stepped back and put her hand to her forehead. "But—but—what relation is she to James?" she gasped.

Wilhelmina's dumfounded mother recovered. "Why—let 's see—second cousin, of course," she said. Suddenly a pleased smile broke over her face. "Well, think of that!" she said. "Dear little Mina."

Henrietta turned upon her. "You 're supporting her, Mama," she cried. "How *can* you? When you know what it means to me!"

"There, there, dear," soothed Bessie, Mina 'll be nice to you."

This reminder of the reversal of their

positions was too much for Henrietta. "I 'll never speak to Wilhelmina again," she blazed.

"Well, I should think you wouldn't!" flared Euphemia.

"Well, I guess Mina 's got a right to marry any one she pleases," bridled Bessie.

"To go off in that underhanded way," cried Henrietta. "You have n't heard about it yet."

Curiosity restrained Bessie and Euphemia while Henrietta went on with her story. "It began with her taking lunch with him. Freda says he came home with her picture that day and put it on his bureau. And last night when I was at the dance—" she choked and began again. "When I was at the dance she dressed up in her velvet dress and went to see Uncle James. They sat in the parlor together on the sofa and talked a long while. They closed the door, but when Freda went past on her way to bed she heard Wilhelmina say, 'I kept it from you a long time, James'—she did n't call him 'Uncle James'—'to be sure I knew my own heart.' And Uncle James said, 'To think the old man still has it in him to make a little beauty like you fall in love with

him'; and then they talked about a lot of things that Freda could n't remember—"

"It seems to have taken her some time to pass the door," sniffed Euphemia.

"And then," went on Henrietta, ignoring the interruption, "Wilhelmina said how she 'd love to take care of him in his old age and all that sort of thing, and then he seemed to be urging her to marry him right away and not wait, and she seemed to be sort of reluctant, but Freda thought she was just putting that on, and then they started to say good-by, and Freda got out of the way in a hurry."

"That 's my little Mina all over," purred Bessie. "The minute any one 's sick she just gives up everything and waits on them. It makes her so happy." Henrietta sniffed. Euphemia drew in her breath, enraged by Bessie's plump satisfaction. "I 'm very glad to hear it," she said. "James wants to be waited on every minute of the day!"

"Wilhelmina can take my place at the office if she wants to wait on him," gulped Jimmy. "I 'm through!"

Euphemia reacted. "Now, Jimmy, don't

do anything hasty," she warned. "You know it is n't—yet—I 'll tell you later." Already she was laying her plans to undermine Wilhelmina. Bessie saw what was going through her head, and began to speak, but she was interrupted. More footsteps sounded on the porch, and another ring came at the door; but this time it was a calm, distinct ring, not a hasty jerk.

Henrietta went to the extreme edge of the window and looked out aslant between the curtains. "Why, it 's Wilhelmina herself!" she cried.

Bessie jumped up and ran to the door. She came back with her arm around her daughter, murmuring, "Where have you been all day, darling?"

Gracefully Wilhelmina removed her coat and dropped it across a chair. "Getting married," she said.

"Damn!" said Jimmy.

Euphemia drew in her breath and released it slowly.

"It 's rather fun," said Wilhelmina evenly, "to be Mrs.—James—Peters."

"Mother's darling little girl," sobbed Bessie, inclosing her daughter in a fond embrace. Wilhelmina was safely beyond Euphemia's reach.

Henrietta paced the floor. In the last analysis Wilhelmina had gone her one better. Oh, if she had only thought of it herself! Uncle James liked her as well as he liked Wilhelmina. She knew she had not the dimpled glance of invitation that was Wilhelmina's specialty, but she was more queenly, more impressive, more fitted to be Mrs.—James—Peters. If only she had not wasted her time over Billy. Yes, the whole thing was Billy's fault. It was jealousy of Henrietta's conquest of Billy that had inspired Wilhelmina to do this thing!

"We went off to Boston in Uncle—in James's car," Wilhelmina was explaining languidly. "James has a friend there in politics who fixed up the license. We were married in the sweetest church—you 'd have loved it, Hen. I really wish you could have been there, but James and I decided at the last moment that we 'd just go off by ourselves

and not ask anybody. James has so much sentiment. We 're going off again to-night on a trip to Canada. I just came home to tell you and to get my bags and things."

Bessie took her child by the shoulders. "Mother will forgive you," she said earnestly. "My darling should n't have done it, but what are mothers for if not to forgive?"

Unconsciously she put a finger on a sore spot in Euphemia's consciousnescs. It had dawned upon Euphemia as well as Henrietta that Wilhelmina had done this thing to outwit her sister. If Billy had not flirted with Henrietta—there! It was Billy again. She might have known Billy would ruin her in the end. It was all very well for Bessie to talk about motherly forgiveness when there was nothing to forgive, but Euphemia would never forgive Billy; no, never.

"James just insisted," sighed Wilhelmina.

"I 've no doubt of it," intoned Henrietta scornfully. "I suppose you did n't go around there and say you could n't keep it from him any longer!"

An electric shock went through Wilhel-

mina. "So Freda was listening!" she cried. "Well, I hope she told you Uncle James said he was glad it was the beauty of the family that fell in love with him!"

"She said nothing of the kind!" cried Henrietta. "She said something *like* that, but it was n't that."

"Oh, Henrietta," reproached Bessie, "you kept something from us."

"I was n't going to repeat Freda's foolish gossip!" stormed Henrietta. "You know perfectly well, Wilhelmina, that Uncle James would just as soon have married me as you!"

"He would nothing of the kind!" cried Wilhelmina. "And if Freda said he said so—"

"What Freda said you said was that I said I never really cared for him," raged Henrietta, "and she said he said he did n't care as long as you cared as much as he cared."

"Well, if she said I said you said that—" interrupted Wilhelmina.

"Children, children," soothed Bessie, "don't spoil this wonderful day—your wedding-day, Wilhelmina—by this foolish quarreling.

Think how much we have to be thankful for—"

"At our expense!" burst out Euphemia, unable to control herself.

"Euphemia," began Bessie kindly—but again footsteps on the porch brought the company to a full stop. This time they were heavy, masculine footsteps, and the ring at the door was sharp, imperative. Silently Jimmy went to the door and came back with Randolph.

"Randolph," cried Bessie, "we have good news for you. Wonderful, wonderful news."

"Well, I 'd like to hear some for a change," said Randolph morosely.

"Tell your brother, Mina," urged Bessie archly.

In her endeavor to be casual Wilhelmina almost suppressed a yawn. "Well, Randolph," she said, " you won't have to take me to any more dances. I have a permanent escort now. I 'm married—to James Peters."

Randolph stopped as though he had been struck by lightning. "To—to—Uncle James," he gasped.

"And we 're going off on a little trip to Canada to-night," added Wilhelmina, as lightly as a butterfly brushing a rose-leaf.

"Canada!" said Randolph in low, tense tones. "He 'd *better* go to Canada."

Something in his voice made his words sound like the pronouncement of doom.

"What do you mean?" asked Bessie sharply.

"I mean that Uncle James is worse than bankrupt," said Randolph evenly.

So deeply rooted was their belief that Uncle James was as substantial as the Rock of Gibraltar that for a moment no one took in Randolph's meaning. They waited for the end of the sentence which would show that he had merely been using a figure of speech.

"I 've been looking into his affairs all day," went on Randolph, "and they 're in a frightful state."

There was a moment of shocked silence. Then slowly a smile dawned upon the faces of Euphemia, Jimmy, and Henrietta, as they turned to look at Bessie and Wilhelmina, who sat motionless, horror-struck.

"When his debts are paid," continued

Randolph slowly, "Uncle James won't have a cent left. What is worse"—could there be anything worse?—"he 's done some kind of double-dealing with a mortgage that 's likely to land him in jail."

Wilhelmina broke into hysterics. It had been a hard day for her. Euphemia unexpectedly joined in. The bitterness of having James's fortune twice snatched from her within ten minutes outweighed her triumph over Bessie. Nothing but choked sobs broke the silence.

Henrietta walked to the window, turning an insouciant shoulder upon her practically widowed sister; for since Wilhelmina had married Uncle James's money rather than Uncle James its loss naturally put her into mourning. "After all, Mina," said Henrietta brightly, "you 'll still have the pleasure of taking care of Uncle James in his old age."

A smothered shriek of rage was all the reply she got from Wilhelmina, but Euphemia unexpectedly took Wilhelmina's part. You never could tell how things would strike Euphemia. Perhaps, however, it was hatred

of Henrietta, who had thrown her line for Billy, rather than sympathy for Wilhelmina, that made her say, "It 's all very well for you to stand there and taunt your sister, but we 'll see how much affection you have for Billy, now Uncle James—is—is—"

"Bankrupt," supplied Henrietta, calmly, "and a criminal. As for Billy—" She turned again to the window, preferring to leave Euphemia in suspense as to what her attitude toward Billy would be. She turned back again quickly. "Here 's Billy now," she said.

Firm, quick footsteps upon the porch preceded an energetic ring at the bell. Wilhelmina hastily dried her eyes and straightened her hat.

"Let him in," said Euphemia grimly, as though it was necessary to give permission before Billy would be allowed to enter. Presently Billy breezed into the room. "Well," he said, glancing around the circle of his emotion-racked relatives, "it looks as if you 'd heard the news."

"*Which* news?" asked Euphemia feelingly.

"Uncle James' smash-up," explained Billy. "Why? Has anything else happened?"

"Wilhelmina's married to Uncle James!" announced Jimmy at the top of his voice, eager to get the flash of limelight that comes to the springer of news.

"Lord!" was Billy's dumfounded comment. "Well—we 'll have to make the best of it."

Wilhelmina drew a deep breath and sank back in her chair. So that was what her great triumph had come to! Even casual congratulations were impossible.

Jimmy strove to get all the pleasure he could out of the situation. "Too bad you 've been having business deals with Uncle James," he grinned.

"If you have," put in Randolph pleasantly, "you 'll be sorry you did n't throw your money into the sea."

"I don't know why you can't mind your own business," raged Euphemia, who was suddenly inspired with the idea that Billy's meddling had brought about James's downfall. Of course it was Billy's finger that had tipped over the pie. She might have known it.

Billy never did have any business sense. "None of these things would have happened if it had n't been for you!"

"Have you been interfering in James's business?" demanded Bessie indignantly.

Billy looked around the circle of his hostile relatives. "How do you feel about it, Henrietta?"

Euphemia's hint that Billy might be involved in his uncle's financial collapse had frightened Henrietta. She had been brought up with the idea that Uncle James was the source and only source of money, and now that he had fallen she felt adrift on a spar. She certainly could not afford to let herself fall in love with Billy, as she surely would if Billy fell in love with her. A dazed mixture of these emotions made her answer pettishly, "Oh, I feel that this whole family has got itself into a fine mess, and I wish I could go away and never see any of you again."

"Very well," said Billy, emotionlessly, "I think it can be arranged. One moment—" he stopped them from speaking—"I want to put the situation before you briefly. Uncle

James is bankrupt. He 's been borrowing money for some time. What he borrowed from me is secured by a mortgage. But Uncle James mortgaged the place a second time and persuaded the man who took the mortgage not to record it. He told him it was a first mortgage. Of course that 's criminal, and will land Uncle James in jail if we don't fix it up, as I think we can."

Bessie and Euphemia sat looking at Billy as they might have looked at James under the same circumstances. He had hypnotized them by his assumption of authority. Jimmy stared with half-open mouth. Randolph stood by the mantel-piece, listening closely. Henrietta had left the window and taken a seat opposite Billy. Had her last words been too hasty? Perhaps she should not have discouraged Billy.

Wilhelmina sat motionless, her hands in her lap, giving herself up to the spell of Billy's voice. At that instant she felt that she did not care what happened to her. She would like to have Billy say one kind word to her, and after that she was ready to die.

Billy went on in a low voice that nevertheless carried: "What I propose to do is to consolidate the Street and Peters canneries, under the Street name. The mortgage practically gives me the Peters building. I 'll have to put a little more into it, of course —probably I 'll buy the second mortgage— but that won't be difficult. Paul will be president, of course. I 'm interested in the business merely as stockholder and director. Paul and I have been talking it over; and we 'd like you to be assistant business manager, Jimmy, if you'd care to take the position. The salary will be adequate. I 'll talk that over with you later. Of course we 'll all have to pitch in and help support Uncle James. If Randolph and Jimmy and I go shares—"

"It 's up to his nephews, you know," shrugged Randolph. "I 'm only his cousin."

"And his brother-in-law," said Billy evenly. "Of course I 'm not proposing to do anything big—just to raise money enough to keep Uncle James going. And I expect Wilhelmina to do most of it, and Uncle James himself to do what he can."

"*I* can't do anything," gasped Wilhelmina. She had been mentally clinging to Billy, the firmest thing to cling to, and he was unclasping her hands and setting her on her feet.

"Oh, nonsense," encouraged Billy. "You 're a perfectly capable girl. I rather think you could buy out Miss Spring's millinery shop and make a go of it. They tell me you make first-rate hats. Of course you 'd have to study it up a bit, maybe at Boston, but I know you could make a success of it, if you like the idea."

Wilhelmina did not, but Billy had hypnotized her. To her, too, he had become the Uncle James of the family.

"Henrietta says she wants to go away," went on Billy. "I 'm sure she could find a job in New York. Certainly she could if she takes a course in stenography first."

Billy's masterfulness had made Henrietta thoroughly repent her foolish words. Billy was surely a coming person. "We 'll go out in your car this evening and talk it over," she suggested.

"I 'm sorry," said Billy shortly; "I 've too much to do. I don't want to force this idea on you. Of course if you want to stay in Stormville it 's none of my business."

Bessie's rising rage overflowed. "If you think you 're going to make my daughters into milliners and stenographers—" she cried.

Unexpectedly Randolph supported Billy. "They 've got to do something," he declared. "I can't take care of too many poor relations."

"It would n't hurt them to do a little work for a change," put in Euphemia. "Look at the way my Martha slaved and toiled in the summer heat," and, suddenly realizing what had happened, she added triumphantly: "And look where she is now! Wife of the president of the Peters Cannery!" To Stormville the title was equivalent to President of the United States.

"He 's not the president yet," wept Wilhelmina. "James is the president, and I 'm his wife."

"Well, it 's nothing to be proud of," flared Henrietta.

Billy winced. "Don't," he begged.

"She ought to know the truth," protested Jimmy. "As business manager I want to tell you, Wilhelmina—"

"I don't want to hear it," interrupted Wilhelmina. "James ran that cannery before you were born."

"And look at the state he got it into!" roared Jimmy, righteously indignant. With the true business manager's instinct to blame his predecessors, he outlined Uncle James's deplorable policies. "Why, it 'll take me ten years to put that cannery on its feet," he said. "I tell you it 's a big job I 've got before me."

"It 's nothing to the job Mina 's got ahead," said Henrietta airily.

"I begin to think," said Billy slowly, "that you 're not worth salvaging, Henrietta."

Wilhelmina jumped up and put both her hands in Billy's. "Billy," she said brokenly, "if you 'll stand by me I *will* be a milliner!" It marked a turning-point for Wilhelmina.

"You won't be a milliner!" cried her exasperated mother.

"She shall be a milliner!" declared

Euphemia. On which Bessie and Euphemia started a little private battle of their own.

In the midst of it the door of the parlor opened, opened slowly. Voices were suspended in mid-air, and all eyes turned toward the door. What new bomb was about to be exploded?

The door swung wide—and in shuffled William Clintock, paper in his hands, slippers on his feet, wonder in his eyes. "What 's this?" he asked, "A party? Why don't you light the gas?"

Billy struck a match on his shoe and lit the gas while Euphemia pulled down the shades. Gas-light somehow gave a new color to things. Bessie rose to go. "No, it 's not a party," she said.

Euphemia summed up the situation: "Wilhelmina 's married to James, and James is bankrupt and going to jail, and Paul Street 's to be head of the cannery, and Jimmy 's to be business manager, and Billy wants Wilhelmina to be a milliner, and I think he 's perfectly right."

William Clintock's eyes fluttered. Hastily

he took a chair. "You don't say!" he gasped.

"James Peters is a scoundrel," said Jimmy, glad to get it off his chest at last.

Responding to long years of training, William Clintock said at once: "Oh, no, no, Jimmy. Your Uncle James is a very fine man," and was surprised to hear his wife break out with, "Oh, William! How can you say such things?"

Anxious to get back into favor, William shook his head at Billy. "Are you mixed up in this thing?" he said reproachfully.

"What 's the matter with Billy?" demanded Euphemia. "Here he 's saving the whole family, and you 're reproaching him. Don't you know it 's Billy who made Jimmy business manager and Paul Street president?"

"Well, well, well," said William Clintock, "that was real good of Billy." He took pains to change the subject. "I see they 've got the income tax returns out," he said, gesturing with his paper. "James made ten thousand last year."

Euphemia seized the paper. Bessie paused. A smile broke over her face.

"Maybe this was all a mistake," she said hopefully.

"He can't have made that much," said Randolph incredulously. "He 's been borrowing right and left."

"Well, they 've certainly got one man down at ten thousand," corroborated Euphemia.

Billy stirred. "Oh, well, it 's somebody else," he said.

"That 's foolishness," objected Euphemia. "You know there 's no one else in Stormville that makes that much. I 'm going down tomorrow to see if they 've made a mistake."

"Don't bother, Mother," said Billy. "As a matter of fact, that happens to be my income tax."

"Mother, let 's go home," said Henrietta.

"Come, Randolph," sighed Bessie, in the midst of Euphemia's questions and exclamations.

But Billy interfered. "I want to speak to Randolph alone a moment," he said. "Mother," he apologized, "would you and Father mind leaving the room?"

Bessie departed with the girls. William

Clintock shuffled away, and Euphemia, after extracting Billy's promise to stay to supper, followed.

Billy, who had held the door open for them to pass out, closed it behind them and stood with his back against it, facing Randolph.

## CHAPTER XIII

### RANDOLPH RECOMMENDS A WAY OUT

"RANDOLPH," said Billy at once, "where is Persis?"

Randolph lit a cigarette and turned to throw the match in the fireplace before he answered over his shoulder, "Why do you ask?"

"Because I 've lost track of her," answered Billy.

"So you 've been watching her these past years?"

"Of course," returned Billy. "I 've always known where she was. And now she 's not at the college, and not at the New York apartment. They have n't lived there for some time. My letters there and to the college have been returned."

"Yes?" said Randolph, blowing out the smoke.

Billy's eyes narrowed. "I want you to tell me where she is," he said.

"Which presumes," said Randolph, "first that I know, and second that I am willing to tell."

"Why do you make a secret of it?" asked Billy.

"Perhaps to spare Persis your tumultuous love-making," smiled Randolph.

Billy was sensitive there. Randolph saw. He clenched his hands until the knuckles were white. It was a moment before he said: "If Persis tells me that she wants me to keep away from her, I 'll do it. Please leave it to her."

"I have other reasons," offered Randolph, "for not telling you where she is." He wondered how much he would tell Billy. He rather enjoyed giving him information bit by bit, but at the same time he must be careful not to go too far. Billy waited. "My relations with Persis," Randolph went on, "are on an unusual basis. She is under great obligations to me."

"You have been of service to her?" asked Billy.

Randolph could not resist the temptation. "I have lent her a good deal of money," he said, watching Billy closely. Randolph knew Stormville standards.

To Randolph's surprise, Billy took the news the wrong way. "That was a privilege. She is n't under obligations to you for that."

Randolph was piqued. "Fortunately Persis has a different code of honor from yours," he said. "She gave me notes for the money."

"Why did she need it?" asked Billy.

Randolph hardly meant to answer, but he found himself saying: "Her father's business went to pieces. She wanted to finish the courses she was taking. It was a reasonable idea. In fact, I suggested it myself."

"Well," said Billy, "I don't see why you can't tell me where she is."

"Perhaps I want to spare your feelings," suggested Randolph. "But if you really want to understand the situation, I might add that the notes I hold signed by Persis are almost due."

"And she can't pay them?" cried Billy.

"Unfortunately I have not yet found her a position," admitted Randolph. "The work she has specialized in has an extremely small, restricted field. It is practically impossible for Persis to find a position without my recommendation."

"Will you let me buy those notes from you?" asked Billy.

"Unfortunately, no," smiled Randolph. "Those notes have a peculiar value to me."

"You 're planning to hold them over Persis to—"

"There 's always a way out," said Randolph, "and there 's one particularly easy way out of this situation, as I 'll try to explain to Persis—very gently."

"You 're trying to force her to marry you?" asked Billy bluntly.

"Hardly," said Randolph, "but I 'm hoping she 'll do me that honor. It will solve her problem and spare her father the knowledge that she is in debt. David Hamilton belongs to the old school, you know. It would be a blow to him. And at present he is not well,

not at all well. Indeed, her father's illness is what has put Persis in these financial straits."

"Of all the dastardly, cowardly—" began Billy.

Randolph stopped smoking. "Not so fast, Billy," he said, looking at his cousin.

Billy towered even over Randolph's slim tallness, his eyes blazing. But he spoke in a controlled voice. "Randolph, you are the most contemptible cur on the face of the earth. I don't even except Uncle James."

"Look here," said Randolph, "you 're going too far. Go back to your cannery and leave Persis to me."

"I 'll never leave Persis to you," said Billy. "I 'll begin now and hunt for her till I die." Randolph looked at him thoughtfully.

"I begin to see," he said, "why Henrietta and Wilhelmina are in love with you."

"W-what do you mean?" gasped Billy, taken off his feet by this change in the conversation.

"I 've been watching them this afternoon," went on Randolph. "Henrietta 's all ready to

fall in love with you, and Wilhelmina 's far gone already. It interests me, from a purely scientific point of view."

Billy saw a new Randolph before him, one who no longer sneered. Perhaps there was a way, after all, to approach Randolph.

"It 's a fascinating psychological study," went on Randolph. "I might have taken up psychology if astronomy had n't caught me first. I 'd really advise you to marry Henrietta, Billy."

So he was sarcastic, after all. Billy turned on him. "I don't care to listen to this," he said.

Randolph threw away his cigarette and faced Billy. "I 'm speaking sincerely," he said in a new voice. "I know I 'm not worthy of Persis, and I know you are. I admire you, Billy, as I admire few people. It 's only lately that I 've realized the stuff that 's in you. I understand why you appeal to my sisters. It 's the same appeal that Persis has for me. You and Persis are real people. People that we can grasp and hold on to. People that we can be sure of. We don't

admire ourselves or each other, and we don't trust ourselves or each other. But we can admire and trust you—you and Persis."

Billy stood speechless. It was as though Randolph had torn off a mask.

"Don't misunderstand me," went on Randolph. "I 'm not giving up Persis. I don't see any reason why I should give up Persis. Morally, if you care for that viewpoint, I 've as good a right to her as you have. Biologically—which is the main thing—I 've a better right to her. If you marry Henrietta and I marry Persis we 'll both benefit the world." The mask was on again. Perhaps Randolph felt that he had said too much. He prepared to leave. "I think the 'party' is over now," he said. "Need I say that I have enjoyed it?"

Billy blocked the way. "Are you going to tell me where she is?" he asked.

"I am not," said Randolph, "much as I regret to be disobliging."

Billy saw that it was no use. He stood aside and let Randolph pass. "Read over 'Evangeline' before you start on your expedi-

tion," said Randolph as he left. "It may cheer you up."

Persis paused before the last flight and shifted her bundles to the other arm. These stairs were pretty stiff. Still, the hallway was wide and airy. There was nothing stuffy about the house. With recovered breath she went up the last flight and knocked on the ground-glass window of her father's door.

"Come in, Persis," called David Hamilton weakly. Persis entered. The room was fairly large and quite sunny, an effect that was enhanced by yellow curtains. David Hamilton was in bed. His thin hand held a book, which he had just put down.

"Randolph 's been here," said Hamilton. "He said he 'd come back again after lunch. I asked him if he 'd found anything for you, and he said not yet."

"Well, I 'm not going to wait much longer," said Persis heatedly. "He keeps urging me to wait, and here it is October tenth and nothing in sight yet."

"Don't get angry with him, Persis," soothed

her father. "Randolph 's a true friend to you, and he 's trying his best. He 's quite right to advise you to wait. I would n't hear of your going into an office."

"Neither will the people in the offices," shrugged Persis. "I 've been around to a lot of publishing-houses this morning, and they all tell me the same thing: it 's a dull year, and they 're cutting down their staffs as it is. If I knew stenography I might get something, but I don't. I don't know anything but astronomy, which is n't very useful round an office."

"Now, Persis, I don't want you to go into an office," complained Hamilton. "I don't like these modern office women. An office is no place for you. Now, if you could teach in a college—"

"But apparently I can't—without Randolph's recommendation," objected Persis. "I tried for half a dozen positions, and they all asked for a recommendation, and I referred them to Randolph, and that was the end of it. Sometimes I think Randolph does n't want me to get a position."

David Hamilton sighed. "Randolph 's a fine young fellow," he remarked. "I wish you—"

Persis rose. "I 'll go and get lunch," she said. She took her bundles across the hall to her own room, a room smaller and darker than her father's, with a part of its space devoted to a kitchenette. They were in an old residence that had been converted into a rooming-house, an unpretentious place, but not without charm. It was in the intermediate neighborhood between Greenwich Village and Old Chelsea, and the roomers were mostly musicians, artists, and writers, more or less unsuccessful.

Persis took a bunch of celery from one of the paper bags she had brought in, cut the red tape that tied it, and prepared to cook it over her two-burner gas stove. Her housekeeping arrangements were simple. The butter was kept in a glass jar that stood in running water in the wash-basin. Granulated sugar was in another jar. Several cans of evaporated milk stood along the shelf below which Persis hung her dresses.

It was not a sumptuous establishment, but Persis did not mind simplicity. It was annoying to be poor, but not, to Persis, humiliating. By her indifference to appearances Persis was inoculated against the real sting of poverty.

While she prepared lunch Persis thought over the situation. Her father did not realize how serious it was. They had only about fifty dollars left. She would simply have to find something soon. She would tell Randolph so this afternoon, tell him that she could not wait any longer for the work he had promised to find for her.

The last few years had been busy ones for Persis. She had finished her college course and done some extra work in astronomy. To a large extent she had been financed by Randolph, though she had earned what she could by tutoring at college.

Once in a great while she had allowed herself to think of Billy, but she felt that it was self-indulgence. She could not marry Billy for years to come, even if he still cared for her. So she had decided that it was better

to drop from his life. If he cared for her still, why reopen the wound? If not—well, that was the end of it.

At lunch-time her father again cautiously circled around the question of Randolph. After a few preliminaries he vouchsafed: "Randolph was very good to me this morning. He said I didn't have the doctor often enough. I think maybe he's right."

"Randolph doesn't realize the financial situation," said Persis coldly.

"Well, there wouldn't be any situation if you'd listen to him," returned her father petulantly. "I can't understand why you're so indifferent to him. Here he's a gentleman, with a good position, a good start in life, and interested in the very subject you're interested in—why, it's ideal. I'm sure I don't see what more you want."

Persis stopped eating and wondered a moment at her father's changed attitude toward her. There had been a time, not long ago, when he would not have heard of her marrying a belted earl. Had illness changed him? Had he grown self-indulgent, so that

he was only considering his own comfort? Did he look at her with different eyes, now that she was no longer a daughter of the pampered rich. No, she decided that he was worried about her future. He knew that she would be at least safe, if not affluent, as the wife of Randolph Kelsey, and he was using any argument that might persuade her to marry him. That was why he was trying to suggest that he did not have the doctor often enough. He thought she would marry Randolf for the sake of the comforts she could give her father.

Randolph came about an hour later. Pausing in the hall, he heard that Persis was in her own room, and so he knocked there instead of at David Hamilton's door. Persis, who had readily adopted the simplified conventions of the neighborhood, invited him in.

"I 'm glad you came. I want to talk to you," she said. "Take that wicker chair. It 's the least likely to break down." Randolph, however, insisted on taking the straight-backed chair and installing Persis in the other.

"Randolph," said Persis, "I 'm hunting for a job. It 's too late now to find one at a college. I 'll just take what I can get here in New York."

Randolph was silent for a moment. Then rather coldly he said, "Evidently you don't care for my opinion."

Persis was tired and discouraged, but, with something more than her usual patience, she answered pleasantly enough, "If it takes into consideration the fact that we 're up against it, I 'd be interested to hear it."

"It does," Randolph replied significantly. "Persis, why can't you care for me? I love you as no one else will ever love you. You bring out the best in me. You 're the one person that I can hold to for ever, the very rock foundation of my life. I *know* I can make you love me. If you 'll only marry me and straighten out all this tangle, I swear to you I 'll make you happy. Won't you—for your father's sake?"

Persis shook her head. "No, Randolph," she said, "absolutely and finally, no. I don't know why I won't marry you, but I know I

won't. I know I never will. I 'd rather starve."

It was not a complimentary way to phrase her refusal, but Persis was tired of saying no.

Randolph sat silent, his expression had changed. Suddenly he asked: "Are we, then, on a purely impersonal basis? Shall I entirely disregard my feeling for you in our future relations?"

"Please do!" flashed Persis. "I 'm tired of being made love to. It would be a relief if you would treat me exactly as you would a casual acquaintance."

"My dear girl," smiled Randolph, suddenly sarcastic, "you don't know what you 're saying."

His banter irritated Persis. "What do you mean?" she asked. "You speak as if there were some reason why we could n't be impersonal."

Randolph still smiled. "I am certainly treating you more indulgently than I would a 'casual acquaintance.' "

"Then please don't!" flashed Persis, "I

don't know what you 're talking about, but I don't want to be indulged."

"Very well," said Randolph, reaching for his hat, "the first payment on your debt to me is due to-morrow. I believe the note is for fifty dollars. I 'll put it through my bank to-morrow morning."

Persis began to speak and stopped short. She had never worried about those notes. Of course she had intended to pay them as soon as Randolph found her a position—that had been understood when she borrowed the money—but she had never dreamed that he would hold them over her.

"But, Randolph," she faltered, "I—I can't —pay them now—and Father must n't know I owe you money."

"As a person with whom you have a purely impersonal business relationship," said Randolph, "that is not my concern."

"You 're contemptible!" cried Persis. "You know very well why I can't get a position! You refuse to recommend me and then hold me up for the money!" She had jumped to

her feet. Randolph rose and stood beside her, looking down at her with a curious expression.

"It was entirely your suggestion that I should treat you impersonally," he said.

"But—but I did n't expect you to do *that,*" cried Persis. "You *know* it would make Father worse if he found out."

"As I said before—that is not my concern," returned Randolph. "I rather need the money. Not seriously—but I have lost a good deal through the failure of a company in which I was a stockholder. I think it would be quixotic of me to consider the circumstances of a creditor who is merely—a casual acquaintance."

"Do you mean that you are really going to do this?" asked Persis slowly, looking up at him.

"Yes!" said Randolph with sudden violence. "I love you at this moment as intensely as I ever did. I 'd throw those beastly notes in the fire if I could once hold you in my arms." He looked at her like a wanderer in the desert gazing at a spring of clear water denied to

him. "But I hate you," he went on, "as violently as I love you. If I can't have you I 'll do all I can to make you miserable."

Persis was dumfounded. Randolph had always been the polite scholar, a person whose emotions had seemed well, almost too well, under control. But she was not weakened by his intensity. Randolph's heat made her own anger die down, but there was steel beneath her quietness. "All of this does n't change the facts," she said. "I don't love you and I never will. Put your note through the bank. I 'll meet it."

"Very well," said Randolph, turning away, "and I expect you to meet the next, which is due a week from to-morrow. After that they follow in rapid succession."

He left her standing there, as calm as though she had thousands in the bank. But through her mind was going the thought, "I wonder how in the world I 'll buy tomorrow's dinner?"

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN WHICH BILLY GOES HUNGRY

THE morning after his interview with Randolph, Billy went early to the Street cannery to talk matters over with Paul. He planned to get back to his barn in time to pack his bag and catch the ten o'clock train for New York. He figured that Persis would be in New York because that was the place people always went when they were looking for work.

He hated to leave to Paul the brunt of the work of rearranging the cannery affairs, but Paul was a good sort. He'd understand. Billy found Paul in a cheerful frame of mind. James Peters's misfortunes did not weigh heavily upon him. And he had news for Billy. It seemed that Wilhelmina had spent the night at the Streets,' after a long talk with Martha. Wilhelmina had made the surprising announcement that she was going

to take out of the bank all the money she had, go to Boston, and look for work in a millinery shop. What did Billy think of that? Moreover, she was going to send part of the money she earned to James Peters. Otherwise, however, she seemed to have no feeling of responsibility for the welfare of her recently acquired husband.

Paul and Billy talked over the consolidation, arranged to take over the second mortgage on the Peters cannery in order to protect James Peters, and otherwise charted their new plans. Billy promised to come back as soon as he could, but he did not know how soon that would be. However, he would keep in touch with Paul by letter.

As Billy turned to go, Paul suddenly remembered something. "Hold on a minute," he said, "Martha told me to give you this." He pulled from his pocket a small package done up in tissue-paper and white ribbon.

Billy felt it tentatively, the way a man always does feel a present. "What is it?" he asked.

"Birthday present," explained Paul.

"By Jove," said Billy, "it *is* my birthday! Martha 's a wonder. She never forgets it." He dropped the package into his pocket.

Back at his barn, Billy was surprised to find two more packages awaiting him, one in and one below his letter-box. He took them in and opened them hastily. "Well, what do you know about that?" he asked himself.

The first was a stick-pin, in one of Hipp's best red velvet boxes. The accompanying card read:

> Wishing you a happy birthday.
>
> MOTHER.

It was the first time in fifteen years that Euphemia had remembered his birthday.

The second package contained a set of silk socks, "with birthday greetings from Jimmy." Billy shook his head and went to pack his bag. He was interrupted by a series of loud bangs at the door. The person responsible for this disturbance of the peace proved to be Eddie Watson, Stormville's most popular runner of errands.

"Hello Bil—" began Eddie, but, remarking that Billy was dressed in regular city style, he hastily changed to "Mr. Clintock." He presented Billy with a good-sized box, and hung around. "Mrs. Kelsey sent them," he said. "They're assorted. You may not like the cocoanut kind. Some folks don't. But I think they 're the best of all."

"So do I," agreed Billy unfeelingly, but he immediately opened the box with "Have some, Eddie." While Eddie took all he could manage with one hand, politely refraining from using both, Billy read the card:

Wishing you many happy returns of the day.
COUSIN BESSIE.

"Eddie," said Billy, "do I look any different to you this morning?"

"Gee, you do look dressed up," Eddie assured him. "Dad said this morning you were getting rich. I like rich people. There was a rich man over at the hotel once, and every time I took anything over to him he gave me a quarter. I guess he was a billionaire."

"Well, I 'm only half of that, Eddie," said Billy. "Here 's a dime."

Billy put up in New York at a small hotel in the forties, and immediately started out for the apartment-house in the East Eighties where Persis had lived and from which his recent letters had been returned. Billy found it and questioned the elevator operator. Did he know the present address of a family named Hamilton who used to live here? The elevator man did not, having been in charge only a month, but he suggested the telephone operator. Billy found the telephone operator in a recess behind the elevator. Did the telephone operator know the address of the family named Hamilton? The telephone operator had been in the apartment-house for five years, and she had no difficulty in remembering Miss Hamilton. (As a matter of fact, she had studied Persis daily and copied her from hat to shoes.) But as to Miss Hamilton's present whereabouts, that was a matter on which the telephone operator could give no information. Her letters had been forwarded to the college, and her

father's letters had been forwarded to the Green Mountain Tin Mines, Inc. But as the Hamiltons had been gone about three years there were no longer any letters to forward.

Billy had already tried to find the address of the tin-mine company, but it had sunk without a trace. He suggested that some one else in the building—the superintendent, perhaps,—might give him further data, but the telephone operator assured him that the superintendent was new. The building had recently passed into new hands, and she was the only former employee who had been retained.

Billy went out into the street without knowing which way to turn, but Fifth Avenue, several blocks to his right, lured him, partly because there was something doing there, and partly because there were trees along one side, and trees made him feel less lonely. He wandered along wondering what he would do next. Perhaps there was some college club where Perşis would be registered—

"Billy Clintock, what are you doing here?" cried a man's voice.

Billy came to with a start and put out his

hand even before he recognized Lawyer Brown.

"Why, *hello,* Mr. Brown," said Billy, grasping the friendly hand, "I did n't know you were down here."

"And I did n't know you were," said Mr. Brown. "What are you up to? You own the whole of Stormville now. Are you trying to buy up New York, too?"

"No—I 'm—I 'm just looking around," stammered Billy. "How did you happen to come down?"

"Oh, I 'm down for a month or two," explained Lawyer Brown. "No one goes to law any more in Stormville, now you own everything. No use suing you. So Mrs. Brown and I thought we might as well have a little trip and see the sights. A man just offered me a nice proposition the other day. Wanted to sell me the Municipal Building very cheap. I thought you might be interested."

"How *can* they tell a hick so quick?" remarked Billy. "It 's probably the necktie. And the hat."

"Get away with you, Billy," exploded Mr. Brown. "It 's the first time I ever saw you dressed up in your life. What are you doing? Looking for a wife? Oh, by the way. That reminds me. I saw an old friend of yours the other day. That girl you used to run around with some. A sensible looking girl, too. I never *could* understand it."

"Who was she?" asked Billy.

"Oh, you know. That girl with fluffy hair that stayed at the inn four or five years ago. From the way she looks she seems to have missed you."

"Where did you see her?" demanded Billy.

"Now where did I see her?" speculated Mr. Brown with a twinkle in his eye. "Did I see her in the Grand Central taking a train, or did I see her taking a boat for Europe?"

"Where was it?" asked Billy breathlessly.

"Well, it was yesterday I saw her," admitted Lawyer Brown. "I was on the Fifth Avenue bus, down by Tenth Street. She was walking along the street."

"Fifth Avenue and Tenth? What time was it you saw her?"

"Oh, I don't know. Am I on the witness-stand? It was in the morning. About ten o'clock."

"Well, good-by," said Billy. "I 'm glad to have met you. Much obliged."

"At the rate she was going she 'd be near Albany by this time, Billy," Mr. Brown called after him. "That kid always was a quick worker," he murmured.

Billy took a bus down-town and got off at Tenth Street. He wandered up and down Fifth Avenue in the dusk and then tried all the side streets from Eighth to Fourteenth as far west as Sixth Avenue and as far east as Broadway.

On his second round he absent-mindedly took in the name of a substantial old-fashioned hotel across the street, the Walpole Hotel. Where had he heard that name before? He passed on, but found himself coming back again a moment later. The Walpole Hotel. Yes, it had a familiar sound. A hearth came before his eyes, and a blazing fire. What had that to do with the Walpole Hotel?

Like a flash it came over him. "We 'll

meet five years from now at the Walpole Hotel. Whatever happens—even if we 're both married—we 'll meet there." He even remembered the table they had agreed to take —the table by the last window in the dining-room.

Billy crossed, entered the hotel, and sat down in the lobby to think it over. It was just possible, just barely possible, that Persis might remember that appointment and keep it. She had suggested it herself.

But what was the exact date? It was now five years since he had met Persis. He closed his eyes and summoned that day when they had become engaged. Pine Island—the fire-light—Persis in a dress the color of lilacs. What was it she had said? "Five years from now—five years from my next birthday." That was it! And her birthday was—the day after his! That was it! October 11. "It 's to-morrow!" said Billy suddenly. "To-morrow at one o'clock."

He sat there for a long while, and when he left it was with a quickened step. Probably it was absurd to think that Persis would re-

member. Nevertheless, Billy felt, somehow, that she would.

The next day Billy reached the hotel at half-past twelve and walked nervously up and down the lobby. Everything hung on the next half-hour. If Persis came—he tingled with hope. But if she did n't— His heart sank like lead.

He had reserved the table by the last window in the dining-room. At exactly one o'clock he entered the dining-room and crossed to the table. The vacant seat opposite him was pushed far under the table, as though there were no chance that it would be used. Billy picked up the menu and tapped its edge against the table. He would not give up hope for ten minutes. She might be late.

The minutes hurried by. The dining-room was unusually busy and short-handed, and no one came to take his order. Billy looked at the big clock at the end of the dining-room. Five minutes had gone.

Resolutely Billy looked out of the window. He could just catch a glimpse of sunny,

prosperous Fifth Avenue. Every one was hurrying. New York was a place to be merry in. It was no place for the unhappy. Miserably Billy looked back at the clock. It was ten minutes past one. Well, he 'd allow himself to hope for two minutes more. Again he looked out of the window. But what was the use of hoping? He knew in his heart that Persis had forgotten.

And Persis *had* forgotten.

The waitress approached, and Billy turned from the window and glanced down at the menu in his hand.

"Bring me—anything," he said gruffly. "Some cold tongue—or anything else that 's ready."

Instead of the scribbling of the waitress's pencil there was a pause—a soundless pause. Billy looked up at the waitress—and into the face that he could never forget—the face of Persis. He rose, speechless.

"Don't, don't," whispered Persis hurriedly. "Sit down, Billy. Let me take your order." Billy sank into his chair.

"Don't look at me, Billy," whispered Per-

sis. "They 'll notice it. I 'm new here. This is my first day, and I don't want to get —fired." She thought she 'd be able to say it lightly, but there was a tremor in her voice. "I 'll bring you something," she said, slipping her order-book into the pocket of her apron and turning away.

Billy sat in a daze. How had it happened? Oh, if only he could rise and seat Persis in the opposite chair! But to sit still while she waited on him—

Persis had recovered her composure by the time she returned. But she brought Billy a remarkable luncheon. She had taken the first things she could lay her hands on. Billy, however, had no idea what he was eating. As he put cranberry sauce on his bluefish he thought only of Persis. "Stay around a minute," he whispered. "Don't go away."

But she whispered back, "I 've a lot to do," and left him.

Billy studied the menu. He would ask for something else. Unhappily the head waitress noticed him, and obligingly offered to take his order. He made it soup, and waved the

bluefish away. He had vaguely noticed that it had a peculiar sweet taste. Besides, he wanted to begin at the beginning.

It was Persis, after all, who brought him the soup. The head waitress had given her the order.

"Please don't order anything more, Billy," she begged. "I 'll see you later. I 'm free at three o'clock. I 'll come out at the door on the up-town side. You can't miss it. Go now, won't you, Billy? I can't think what I 'm doing when you 're here."

The head waitress approached. "Is anything the matter?" she asked.

"N-no, no indeed," stammered Billy. "This is—is just what I wanted for dessert." He tried to show an interest in the soup. After a few spoonfuls, however, he gave up and left the dining-room.

In the lobby Billy changed from chair to chair. From this one he could sometimes catch a glimpse of Persis. From this he could see the dining-room clock, which had slowed down considerably after its ten-minute spurt at one o'clock. At last even this malicious

clock grudgingly admitted that it was seventeen minutes to three. Billy took his hat and went out into the street. Up and down he walked in front of the side door of the hotel. After an eternity it opened and several women emerged. A second later Persis came out alone.

Billy was by her side in an instant. He took her arm, as though he feared she might get away from him. "Which way?" he asked.

"Across Fifth Avenue—west," she answered. He piloted her through the traffic, and they started down Ninth Street.

"How did you ever happen to be there, Billy?" asked Persis.

"Why—why to meet you," stammered Billy.

"But how in the world did you know I was there?" wondered Persis. "Nobody else knew it. How *could* you have known I 'd be there?"

Billy smiled down at her earnest astonishment. "Why, Persis," he said, "you told me so yourself."

"What are you talking about, Billy?" demanded Persis. She was the same Persis. Adversity had not crushed her.

"You told me so yourself," repeated Billy gravely. "You told me to meet you there."

"Billy Clintock, talk sense," ordered Persis.

So Billy talked sense. "Don't you remember saying, 'We 'll meet five years from my next birthday, October eleventh, at the Walpole Hotel at one o'clock?' Don't you remember it, Persis? How you said: 'Even if we 're both married to other people, we 'll meet there?' "

Persis drew in her breath quickly. "You 're *not,* are you, Billy?" she asked.

"Of course I 'm not, Persis," he answered in a low voice. The fingers holding her arm quivered. It seemed to Persis as though the sun had emerged from a cloud and was enveloping her in a soul-satisfying warmth.

"Yes," she said hurriedly, "I do remember how we agreed to meet there at the Walpole."

"But you did n't keep the appointment," Billy scolded.

"Was n't I there?" demanded Persis.

"Was n't I just where I said I 'd be—and on time, too? Billy—it was wonderful. It was providential. Was n't it providential, Billy?"

Billy nodded gravely. "Yes," he said, "it was providential."

By the time they reached her home he had told her of his interview with Randolph and his search for her, and she had rehearsed briefly what had happened to her during the last years. "So you see I had to get a job at once," she explained. "We were frightfully up against it. And I 'd heard two girls talking in the subway about how much a waitress makes—forty dollars a week they said—and it seemed to me that that would be the simplest way to keep going. Of course I could n't tell Daddy about it, but don't you think it was a reasonable idea, Billy?"

"Very reasonable," agreed Billy, whose conception of a waitress was a person who waited—a simple and workable hypothesis.

"So I went to the Walpole because I knew all about it," went on Persis. "We used to stay there years ago. And they were very short-handed, but they said they did n't take

inexperienced help. So I told them I knew all about the etiquette of waiting—how you must n't spill soup on the patrons and that sort of thing—and they finally agreed to try me out. The head waitress said she 'd keep an eye on the people I served. I certainly did think I was done for when you started to make a scene. Here 's where I live. Take a long breath before you start the ascent. It 's pretty stiff." But to Billy it was like climbing the golden stairway.

Persis knocked softly at her father's door, and, getting no answer, peeped in. "Daddy 's asleep," she whispered. "We 'll go into my room."

Like a worshiper entering a temple, Billy entered the little room across the hall.

"Just put your hat on the pantry shelf up there," invited Persis, "and take whatever looks to you most like a chair." But Billy did not sit down. He stood watching her gravely while she put away her hat and coat and touched her hair lightly before the mirror.

She turned from the mirror and looked him

over. "There 's more of you than ever, Billy," she said. "But you have n't changed much. You look older, of course, and as though you 'd be able to give a weighty opinion on any matter that came up; but you 're Billy still, the same Billy."

"With the same one interest in life," said Billy, moving over to her. He took her hands in his and looked at her gravely. "You 're still the center of everything," he said. "Other matters revolve around you, but you 're fixed there at the heart of things for ever. Persis—do you feel the—the way you used to?"

"Just exactly the same," said Persis.

For a long while they sat together on the couch, his arm around her. "How soon can we be married. What 's the very soonest?" Billy asked at last.

"Billy," said Persis, "if you 'll let me sit over there in that straight chair I 'll give you a sensible, strong-minded answer. I 'll tell you we won't get married until I 'm supporting myself and Daddy and have paid Randolph every cent."

"Persis," said Billy, "if you ever go near that straight-backed chair again I 'll pick you up and carry you off cave-man style. Do you think for one instant I 'll wait one second longer than is necessary? Have n't I waited five years, Persis? Five thousand years. We 'll go right down now and get the marriage license."

"Billy," protested Persis, "you know I can't think sensibly until you let me go. Please—don't let me go."

"I won't," promised Billy.

In the years that followed, Stormville came to recognize Billy as its first citizen. Indeed, when James Peters died, two years after Billy and Persis were married, the local paper headed his obituary notice: "Uncle of William Clintock, Jr., Passes Away." It was Stormville's ultimate compliment. Even David Hamilton, who had been installed in the home of a young Stormville doctor, began to realize the importance of his son-in-law.

The Clintock and Kelsey families settled

down to the new order of things. Wilhelmina, after several years in Boston, opened a millinery shop in Stormville and did well. Soon after her husband's death, however, she married a Boston haberdasher and moved permanently to that city. Randolph was called to a Western University as the head of a department and married a wealthy widow, who developed a neat stock of jokes on his obsession for star-gazing. Henrietta, after a futile attempt to ensnare Jimmy—futile because Euphemia was on the job—married a traveling salesman. He subsequently congratulated himself that he traveled.

Cousin Bessie continued to live in Stormville, and to remember Billy's birthdays, a matter of annual irritation to Euphemia.

Billy gave his mother a liberal allowance so that she began to take the place she felt entitled to as the mother of Stormville's leading citizen. He urged her to take a trip to Europe, but somehow she had lost all interest in Europe. Perhaps it was not so much Europe as the hope of Europe that had lured her.

William Clintock branched out. He subscribed to an evening paper as well as a morning one. This gave him a different outlook on life. The evening paper was Democratic, and the morning, Republican. Their contradictory statements gave a new drama to his day. In the morning he was as strong a Republican as ever, but in the evening he leaned ominously toward the Democratic party. When election day came he committed a sin which he would have believed himself incapable of a few years before. He split his ticket.

Martha and Paul had half a dozen energetic children, whom their Grandmother Clintock often advised to be polite to their Uncle Billy. But, to Billy's relief, they never treated him with any particular respect, for they were on intimate terms with their Uncle Billy and Aunt Persis and their three little cousins, and often dropped in uninvited to take breakfast on a breakfast porch facing the sea.

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